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The Boy Whom Everybody Wants

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A Series of Addresses Spoken to Boys and Girls who Think

BY

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'*The Beauty of Goodness*,' '*The Lord's Day*,' &c., &c.

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TO

MY DEAR CHILDREN

MARY, TOM, ELAINE,

MY SEVEREST CRITICS

BUT ALSO

MY WISEST HUMAN TEACHERS,

AND MY HOLIEST HUMAN INSPIRATION.

Note

I HAVE a friend, who, with somewhat 'frantic boast,' says that he has never yet found it necessary to make a children's sermon. How strange! To me that has been one of the imperative calls of every part of my ministry. I have never failed to talk to children, to very little ones with a view to interest, to older ones with a view to direction and determination. I began my public work in this way, and I should be glad, if, when the end comes, my last words should be spoken to children. They have the eternal fascination, they fling wide the gates to the infinite vistas, they lay upon the heart the solemn and irrevocable burdens. No man can look into their wistful faces, with that far-off look which so often lingers in their eyes, without a desire to guide their feet and to inspire

and fortify their hearts. It is a haunting sense of high possibility that possesses the soul in the presence of such a company. And the very deepest things in life respond to it.

These addresses were spoken to the older children, the children who think. I have never felt that simply to interest them was an adequate discharge of my responsibility. Not to interest them is, of course, fatal to all else: but merely to interest them seems to me to be nearly equally fatal. And so I have been alert to find subjects that were interesting—and that is an unending quest when one has to give five-and-forty such addresses in a single year; and I have taken pains to keep them within the limit of a child's intelligence, though I believe that to be both wider and deeper than many imagine. So I have not confined myself only to the simplicities, but have often suggested things of large significance and far-reaching power. Every one of these addresses has stood the test of

hearing, and I have never wanted an interested congregation of little people. That is not said in defence of vanity, but as a witness to truth.

Nearly all these addresses were given within the limit of a year. They are a little handful taken out of a far larger number. Some have already appeared in print in answer to the demand of some older people who heard them, others are now printed for the first time. No memory is sweeter than that of intimate intercourse with a child, and I have many friendships that are sacred and beautiful that were begun through the children's addresses. If this should add to them, or far better, add to the friends of Christ, I should have a repayment of service that would outrun all its merits, and fill my cup of gratitude and joy to overflowing.

As I look back along the years that are gone, I have an assured and growing conviction, that if there be any work of mine which will bear the strain of the final test,

it will be the work that I have tried to do among the children of my church. And if I were beginning my ministry, I would devote a far larger measure of time to the guiding of little feet in the great ways, and to winning them to the Highest that this world has seen. That might, that would, involve some sacrifice of things to which men have attached great importance. But if these high things were brought down from their glory, there would be a better chance for the uplifting of the things that are humble and meek. The future of the religion of Jesus in the world lies with the children, and when we see that, and order our life and work in its recognition, the morning star of the great day will have already appeared.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
NOTE	7
'THERE'S PLENTY OF ROOM AT THE FRONT'	13
'MIND THE PAINT!'	30
Y	45
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD . .	57
THE GOLDEN AGE	71
MY WATCH	87
THE RUDDY BOY OF THE BEAUTIFUL COUNTENANCE . . .	103
A LITTLE MAN WITH GREAT DIFFICULTIES	119
BUILDING A CHARACTER . .	130
RED, WHITE AND BLUE; OR WHAT THE FLOWERS SAY . . .	151
BUXTON TO HARTINGTON . .	165
THE BOY WHOM EVERYBODY WANTS .	178

'There's Plenty of Room at the Front'

A PREACHER often finds the subject upon which he will speak to little people in funny places. Some of mine have come up out of the golden East; others I have found in shrewd sayings and fine stories of the far West; some I have gathered, as children gather beautiful flowers, under the sunny skies of Italy; and quite a score I have found in that land of deathless romance and wizardry, the Greece of two thousand years ago. Sometimes I have made a book reveal its secret, a piece of statuary speak, a poem sing aloud its sweet music, a little dimpled child tell a wonderful story, or an old man declare the great passion that, perhaps all unconsciously, has ruled every bit of his life. Almost wherever I go, when I go with

my eyes open, I find a suggestive theme—sometimes on the wall of a house, sometimes in a great building, sometimes in a public school. They glitter before my eyes like dazzling diamonds. One of the best I found in front of the Mansion House, and the last at a great London railway station. The one that I want to speak about to you to-day, I found many years ago in the big city of Liverpool.

I

It all happened like this. I was hurrying to get from Liverpool to Manchester, for there, there was a very little girl, whom my heart hungered to see. No one should hurry for a train, though I fear I have often very little time to spare. And I came to the station about two minutes before the train should start. A crowd really surged at the wicket gate, and everybody pressed and hurried for his seat. The back of the train was crowded, and yet every one strove to press in and find a place. Suddenly,

above all the tumult, there rang out a strong clear voice, 'There's plenty of room at the front!' I like room. I hate to be one of twelve in a third-class carriage. And so I heeded the call, and to my astonishment found the front of the train practically empty. I got a comfortable corner seat, and nearly a whole compartment to myself. In a moment the train moved off, and I sat —shall I say the truth?—getting cool. Presently I fell into a brown study, a day-dream—one of those delightful moments when this old actual world fades away, and a world of the mind's own creation is all about you, and in that world I kept hearing the old guard's voice, saying, 'There's plenty of room at the front.'

I fell to meditation, to castle-building, to the deep delights of imagination. What lovely times these are!—how brief the hours become, how short the journeys, and with what joys they are crowded! And I said to myself. Are trains the only places where there is plenty of room at the front? Has

this thing far wider applications? Is it possible that a porter's word touches life and shows its opportunities, its greatness and its sanctity? Does this word reach out into wide places where boys and girls, and men and women live? Does it hold a candle in life's dark places, and cast a glory where it is hard? Does it show a way where it seemed as though there were only a blank wall, or a deep sea, or a precipitous rock? Has it the secret of new hopes, and strong inspirations, and safeguards and upholdings? So I thought, so I questioned, until the guard's word became to me full of great meanings. It was like a lighted candle to my feet, a voice that called to me from the very top of the hill, a far-off shining goal which beckoned, and challenged, and made demands which I felt I ought to meet.

It is very wonderful how a casual word becomes full of great meanings and suggestions when you sit with it, and think about it, and ask it questions. It opens up long vistas, it lights dark places, it interprets

things that are hard. So it was with this little familiar sentence. To speak truth, it is true of every place where excellence counts, where high things have value, where nobility is something more than a name. The back is crowded, the low-lying places are full. The air is stifling, the atmosphere is heavy, there is no room for the full use of the powers. But at the front, on the heights, the spaces are ample, clear, cool, invigorating. Everywhere there is plenty of room at the front. The top places clamour and cry for people to fill them. Let us begin to look, and look with wide-open eyes, and we shall see.

II

Now I do not want simply to say that everywhere there is plenty of room at the front, but I want to show you how true it is. And so we will look at the thought in several ways, we will see if it is true where your life lies with its hopes and joys.

Let us begin to look, where every boy

and girl begins the serious part of his life—at school. The bottom of the school is far more crowded than it is at the top. There are far more children who cannot do a thing than who can. The early pages of all school books are more thumbed than the last. There are more who can do simple division than can do proportion, and far more who can do proportion than can do repeating decimals and stocks. And there are more who get things wrong than who get them right. More boys can decline a Latin noun than can conjugate a Latin verb. More know the geography of England than they do that of Europe, and more know that of Europe than that of the world, and more can talk of the world than of the universe. In the place where children learn what we call the rudiments, there is very little room, and it is hot and crowded and noisy. But at the front, where learning is pursued in its higher reaches, where it is full of pleasure and rare delight, there is plenty of room; for the way is narrow, and

the ascent steep, and few there be that find it.

But it is just here that every boy and every girl should strive to get. To excel at school should be their fine ambition, that is one of the great thoughts that should fill their present days. It is unworthy, if one have the ability, to be at the bottom; and to be satisfied with a middle place is the sign of an imperfect mind. It is hard enough to be content with these, if one has to be. To excel, to reach the very best, to stand upon the highest summit—that is a fine purpose, that a worthy and inspiring ambition. For that, hard work should be welcomed, sacrifices be counted helps, and even hindrances be looked upon as stepping-stones. And he who sets these before himself will find strange and unexpected supports, and deep and delicious joys. Difficulties will submit to his effort, they will scatter like a flock of frightened sheep before the power of a high purpose. Fears will vanish. The very peril of the

ascent will give zest to the climb, and boy or girl shall find on the way

> . . . . the stubborn thistle bursting
> Into glossy purples, which outredden
> All voluptuous garden roses,

and, at the end, the victory and the joy upon which he had set his heart.

But my little text has a wider application, and it is deeply true of work. Of every boy and girl the Lord of our life has said, 'Six days shalt thou labour and do all that thou hast to do!' Everybody has to work, and ought to do it as one of life's finest disciplines, as well as the secret of its deepest joys. It is one of the laws of our well-being, it is one of our surest safeguards, and it brings some of life's deepest rapture.

But here again it is very crowded at the back, while there's plenty of room at the front. So far as I can see every crossing that wants a sweeper has one. Every door that wants minding has an attendant. Every newspaper that wants a seller has

one. Every boot that needs to be cleaned has one to clean it. Every errand that has to be run, has, at least, a boy who is ready to walk it. In all the lowly places there is a crowd. But up there, where the higher work is done, where the artist paints a beautiful picture and the poet sings a beautiful song, where the musician makes the air to vibrate with exquisite melody, where people lift their work into beauty, and touch it with glory, and find delight and even rapture in the doing of it—up there, there is always plenty of room.

You will not believe it, but it is true. It is far harder to find a man who is worth twenty pounds a week, than it is to find one who is only worth one. Excellence is far less common than that which is quite ordinary. There is infinitely more level and low-lying land in humanity than there are hills and undulations. Far less often we meet with a boy and girl who can do exceptional things than we do with one who can do ordinary things. Grass is commoner

than flowers; there are more roses than orchids, there are many stars but only one sun. Boys and girls! you have to work. That is God's law for life, from which there is nothing but an ignoble escape. Strive to work well, to do everything that you touch in the best way. Strive to do high things. Do not be content with that which is easy. Set the high places before your thought, and never lose sight of them. Let the high lights always burn before your eyes. The front! the front! let that be the goal of your endeavour. And know, for your comfort and your strength, that every least bit of work which you do faithfully, putting your very soul into it, leads you inevitably and surely along the highway that leads to perfectness, to beauty, and to glory. In the whole vast sphere of work, there's plenty of room at the front.

This little text reaches up higher still, and touches the greatest thing in us, the thing that gives us all worth and all our glory. There's plenty of room at the front

in the sphere of character. Character is what a man is. Not what he has, not what he thinks he is, not what others think him to be. But just what he is, when he is alone with God, and none but God sees him. You will not have been long in the world before you will find that there are a great many very ordinary people in it. They are all very much alike, and dress the same way, and think the same thoughts, and look the same looks, and say the same words, and do exactly the same things. There is so little that marks them off from others. They have no deep generosity of soul, no radiant whiteness of spirit that shines so brightly that nobody can miss them in life's common way. They have no splendour of sacrifice, no high passion for justice and mercy and good, no courage that assaults the high places of evil, no dedication that covers all and that is complete. But so much is level and grey and undistinguished. And among the commonplace people there is literally no

room. It seems as though nearly everybody had crowded in there.

But up at the front, where every face is touched with heaven's beauty, where all the eyes are homes of silent prayer and splendid loyalty, where love burns with a sacrificial passion, where heaven's sweet charity finds an abiding earthly tabernacle, where the garments are always white, and the hands are full of gracious service, and the feet are shod with preparedness, and life peeps into glory and already catches its transfiguring ray, up there, sad to say! there's plenty of room. Lads and lassies! you may lack many distinctions. The glitter and glow of this world may never be yours. But this distinction you may have, and it outglories all others, that you may be good. You may be something. You may know the secret of pure thoughts, real and kindly words, and golden deeds. And he who knows this, drinks of a richer wine than is ever handed in a golden chalice. He is on the way to the very

height. Being good, according to the mind of Christ, he has won for himself in the world of character, a place at the front. It is not a place of boast and vain-glorying: but of humility and high distinction and abiding glory.

Once more, and last of all, my little railway station text is true of that great pure home of God. There's plenty of room at the front—in heaven. Heaven is the home of the great Father, and in His thought and intention, of all the children whom He has made. God has a hungry heart, a hungry heart for love. He wants His children's hearts, and like a tender mother, He looks for the day to come when all the children shall be gathered to the Father's home and to the Father's heart. But even there there is a back and a front, a nearness and a far-off-ness. The mother of St. James and St. John wanted her sons to be very near to our Lord—'to sit,' she said, 'one on His right hand and the other on His left.' And that is really what every good

mother wants for her child—a high place in the kingdom of heaven. But many of us are quite content with little ambitions here; we shall be satisfied with back and delighted with middle places. If half the saints whom I myself have heard express what they call the 'humble desire' to get just within the door of heaven, get there, that is likely to be a very crowded place. They will be the people who have not made the complete renunciation, who have not resisted unto blood the striving against sin, who have just missed the splendour and the rapture of sacrifice, who have known a limit to their dedication. And of these there are a great many, a multitude that no man can number.

But they who stand at the front and gaze with enrapt eyes, and transfigured faces, and burning hearts into the radiant face of Jesus, and feel His gladness and share His joy—these are they who touched earth's commonest things with a complete fidelity, who trusted and could be trusted,

who gave up all, and for love's dear sake followed Him in every path, even when it dipped through Gethsemane, and rose and crossed the hill that is called Calvary.

To-day there is certainly one vacant place in heaven, and that the greatest place of all. That vacant place is the one next to our Lord, the place at His right hand; and it is reserved for him who into life's few transitory years can cram the greatest amount of faithfulness. Not for him with the greatest gifts, nor for him who creates the greatest stir; but for him who puts all that he hath of love and sacrifice and faithfulness into every least thing that he touches. That is not too great an ambition to be nourished by the simplest child, that by sacrifice and love, and homage and service, and by the whole-souled following of Christ, he may be counted worthy of that high uplifting. The highest place a vacant place, and near to it many another. In the high glory of heaven—there's plenty of room at the front.

III

I heard the strong clear note: 'There's plenty of room at the front!' But the people still crowded in at the back. 'How strange it is,' we say, 'how stupid!' And yet in far larger things that is exactly what we do. We have seen the heights and have heard of their glory, we know of the front, and the pure and abiding delights that are there, and we see the way, and we are urged to follow it; and yet we hold back, and press in with the crowd, and are quite content with little things. The door that is near attracts us, its hospitable openness draws us.

Boys and girls: Be ambitious. Ask God to help you to keep before your eyes the things that are high. Give your heart to the best. Be always alert for that which excels. Despise the things that are easy, they are always little. Leave the things which you can quickly attain, they have neither glory nor power. Strive for the things that are high and hard. Do not

creep but learn to fly. Do not be always looking to the ground for lost sixpences, search the heavens for shining stars. Press forward and reach out, and urge your way to the things which are at the front. For hath He not said, whose great name is Faithful, 'To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with Me on My throne'? And you shall find your place, and lo! it shall be at the front. There, where life has lost all its sorrow and the tears are wiped away; where everything is full of beauty and peace and joy; where God walks with His children and talks with them, your happy heart shall know how great God is and how infinite His glory, and what rapture they know who are His, enfolded in His compassionate love for ever and ever. Let this be your sign and signal, and in this hope shall you conquer: There's plenty of room at the front.

'Mind the Paint!'

THE way-side of life is everywhere littered with little bits of wisdom. It is not only our father and our mother who are giving us advice, and telling us what to do and how to act: but advice is given to us upon a wall, it hangs from a lamp in the street, it is written up upon a board, we find it on a gate. In fact it meets us everywhere: and he who has eyes that really see can find guidance in many an unexpected place. *Keep to the right!*—it is the law of the road. People can get about better in the streets if men will heed that counsel. Yes! but it is also a wise law for all conduct. If I obey that I shall not miss my way in the highest things. Always to keep to the right, in my thought, in my words, in every act that I ever do, in the whole of my life. *No admittance except on business.* I cannot

go everywhere. There are some places that are sacred, sacred to those who have business there. They only can be admitted. I have no right to force my way there. That is a great counsel to heed. I must keep sacred places in my own life, nor admit any one to these secret places; and I must regard these in the lives of others. *Trespassers will be prosecuted.* That is to say acts have consequences. Many boys and girls forget that. They think that words and thoughts and deeds are separate things. If they could see they would know that to every one of them there is attached a consequence which no man can break away. And he who does wrong always has to suffer for his wrong-doing. The sharpest cannot escape it. God has bound these two things together and no one can separate them. This is how the Bible states it: 'Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.' And so it is with this little text upon which I wish to speak to you to-day. *Mind the paint. Wet paint.* That is how

it is written. That has some things to say to-day.

I

Recently, as I have gone about my daily work, I have seen these words written in many a place. They have just been painting the letter-boxes here-abouts, they have been giving to them a coat of brilliant scarlet, and when I went to post my letters, I noticed written on the pavement all round the letter-box these words, 'Wet paint.' 'Wet paint.' I noticed it also about the lamp-posts. They have just had a new coat, and though it is not as brilliant as that of the letter-box, it is new; and around them all these are the words, 'Mind the paint.' As I have gone to the houses of my friends in this spring-time I see the same thing. The posts of the gate, the front door, the window-sashes have been painted, and lest I should dirty my hands or my clothes, my friends have written all about, gentle warnings. They want to guard me, and so they say, 'Mind the paint.' 'Wet paint.'

I stood near to the letter-box. In big letters there was written on the pavement all about it, 'Wet paint,' 'Wet paint.' But I noticed a tiny lad coming along, and he was attracted to the letter-box. He had no letter to post, but the brilliant red of the box caught his eye, and it drew him to it. 'Is it wet?'—he said, and he touched it, and when he found that his finger was red, he wiped it on his coat. He left a finger-mark on the letter-box and a stain upon his coat. Presently a little girl came, and she could not believe the words on the pavement, and she too touched it, she has left a mark on the box and also on her own finger. And I dare say that if I could have stood there for hours I should have seen that thing repeated again and again. There was something inside these children that made them inquire, and examine and see.

Boys and girls, each of us has a great gift. It is a gift which you may use for high purposes or for little ends. It is the

gift of inquisitiveness. It is a fine gift, and it is a gift which you ought to use. Most of you do use it. It is quite easy to laugh at a child cutting open the bellows to see where the wind comes from, or at a girl cutting open her doll to see what is inside, or at the boy who takes his watch to pieces to see how it works. But this is not of necessity destructiveness. It is that natural inquisitiveness which is part of your very mind. You want to know. You have a great hunger for knowledge. And this is the way that it shows itself. You ask questions, you peep into things, you try to find out. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Fathers and mothers, and teachers and preachers, and everybody has just been set in this world to answer your questions. Do not be afraid to ask them. Do not be afraid to be inquisitive, because in the very moment when you cease to inquire, a great part of you will have begun to die. Inquisitiveness is the mind's desire for food; it is hungry to know. So when people say that you are

inquisitive do not be ashamed and go red; but be glad, for that is the thing that drives us along the high-way to knowledge, and no man ever yet got wise who was not inquisitive.

But inquisitiveness is of two kinds. It is great or little, noble or mean. That perhaps is hard for you to understand, and I must try to make it clear. The thing itself is always great, always noble; but it may be used in a way that is little and that makes it mean. Let me show you how that is. Sir Isaac Newton, one of the greatest men that has ever lived upon the earth, one day sat beneath an apple-tree, and he saw an apple fall to the ground. Plenty of people would have taken no notice of that. 'Apples fall!'—they would have said, if they had said anything—'why, they have always fallen, they fell in my grandfather's day and a long time before him.' But not so with Sir Isaac. 'Why did that apple fall down to the ground?' he said; 'why didn't it fall upward, or outward, to

the right or to the left?' 'Why was it?'—he kept on saying to himself, 'why was it?' And that was the beginning of a long search. He wondered, he thought, he put two and two together, and at last he discovered that there was such a thing in the world as what he called the law of gravitation. That great discovery began in his mind when he saw an apple fall. Many a man would never have thought about it at all; but he thought until he wrested out of the very hand of nature one of her greatest secrets. That was a noble inquisitiveness, and like all inquisitiveness it led on to noble attainment and helped to make Newton the very great man that he was.

Yes! but there is an inquisitiveness which is not noble, which is always prying and trying to find things out that we are better not to know of. It cannot accept what is said and written, it must try for itself. It reads, 'Wet paint!' It is there in big letters, a blind man could almost read them,

and yet it has to come and touch it, to be quite sure. I met a boy this morning with his arm in a sling. 'Hullo!' I said, 'what's the matter?' 'I have burnt my hand!' he said. Is there really any need that I should go home and put my hand in the fire to see if fire burns? It has burned him—that should be enough for me. And there are a thousand things in this world about which there is no need that I should inquire. And there are a host of things which I shall be better not to know of, at least for the present. I may have to know them later, but for that knowledge I can wait. We degrade a very noble quality when we use it for mean ends.

So, I want to say to you little people: Keep your inquisitiveness under control, unless you mind it will lead you into places where you ought not to go, into doing things that you ought not to do. There are plenty of things in this world that are not your concern, they are the private matters of other people's lives. Into the mouth of

a restive horse they put a bit, and they hold him in with a bridle. We must do that with our inquisitiveness. It needs direction. It needs control. It must be guided to the highest. There are many things here to which it is wise for you to close your eyes. There are some things that you must not taste now, and there are some that you must not touch. Be content not to know. It is better not to know evil things. Mind what books you read. Take care of the pictures you look at. Your mind and heart are very sensitive now, and there may come a day when you would give all you have to wipe out an impression which may be made to-day. Some will tell you of the delights of such knowledge, they will say to you bigger boys that you ought to know —you will have to know when you are bigger, why not know now? Turn deaf ears to their words. Shut your eyes. Control your desire. Inquisitiveness is only great when it is directed to great things and to great ends. 'Mind the paint.' It is wet,

it says so, there is no need for you to touch to be sure.

II

Then I noticed a second thing, and about that I want to say just a word or two. Both the boy and the girl touched the paint, and they were both stained. They could not avoid that. It was wet, it said that, it said is as curtly as it could say it, and, of course, it came off on their hand. You cannot touch pitch without being defiled. They could not believe the words that were written upon the pavement, and so, they stretched out their hands and touched, and lo! they themselves were made unclean, and they carried the mark of their thoughtlessness upon themselves.

Everything that we do on this earth has consequences. An act is not a thing that stands apart, a lonely thing, cut right off from all that has gone before it, and dragging in its train no after effects. It has fastened to it a certain consequence; we may not see it, but it is there. It may not

come into sight in a moment, but it certainly will come. God has fastened them together and no man can put them asunder. That is the thing that gives such seriousness to life, that is why we should ponder our words and guide our feet with care. Thoughts have consequences. Words have consequences. Acts have consequences. Is that a wonderful thing? Its wonder is not half so striking as its truth. 'Surely!' you say,'—'I can think and love, and there will be no consequences of that!' No you cannot. The secret thought and the hidden love are not things by themselves. They have fastened to them things that we can never unfasten, they drag behind them that which we can never unloose.

A great writer once wrote this sentence, 'Thoughts dye the mind,'—they stain it with their own colour. You have perhaps seen a dyer as he dips a piece of material that he wants to dye into the liquid colour, and it comes out the colour that he wants it to be. Yes; but that is not all. The dyer's

hand is of the same colour. In dying the cloth he has dyed his hand. Now it is just like that with our thoughts. We think them in secret. Nobody knows what we are thinking about, they cannot see into our mind, they do not know the ways of our soul. We can think what we like. It is the little part of our life that is hidden away, which no one can rule but ourselves. But every thought we ever think leaves its mark upon us. Our very soul takes that colour. If the thought is pure and high and good, then the soul catches its glory and shines with its brightness. But if the thought be dark, untrue, impure, then it leaves a dark mark upon the heart, it stains it, and if we could see it we should be shocked at the very sight. Boys and girls, mind what you think! Do not let your thoughts go running about just where they will. Control them. Hold them in check. Fix them upon things that are high. Bad thoughts make bad men. They stain the soul. At last, they quite destroy the life.

And that is true also about our words. God has given us a tongue, and some of us use it very freely. But I wonder if we always remember that there is never a word that we speak, but comes back upon ourselves, and leaves its mark upon our very soul. Sometimes, I hope often, I wish it were always, we speak kind words, and words that are full of gentleness and love, and as we speak them our heart grows tenderer and more truthful, and our very life is lifted up into their beauty and grace. That is beautiful, and that will help us to live our life in the spirit of beauty, to speak kind, gentle, loving words, always and everywhere. But every evil word, every word that is untrue, every word that is unreal and insincere, that also leaves its mark upon us. You cannot say what is untrue and not be changed. You cannot touch a lie and not be defiled. The word runs back into the soul and stains it, it leaves a dirty mark, and that we cannot wipe out. If I stain my finger by touching paint that is wet, I

can very soon get the paint off my finger. But all the waters of the sea are not enough to wash the stain of a lie out of my soul. Boys and girls, guard your lips. Set a watch about these gates. Mind what you speak. Abhor lies. Shun words that are touched with untruth. He who would keep a true heart must keep a truthful tongue; and he who would keep his soul pure must mind that his words are clean.

We must mind what we touch with our thought, we must mind what we touch with our words. Yes! But we must mind also what we touch with our hands. The things that we do have a knack of getting back into our hearts and leaving a mark upon them which we cannot get out. In one of Shakespeare's plays, which some of you may have read at school, there's a story told of a murder. It was very cruel. But one of those who had been most active in the murder was greatly troubled as soon as it was done. She used to walk in her sleep, and this was her trouble, that her hand was

red with the blood of the murdered man. There was no blood upon her hand. It was clean as it ever had been before. No! The blood was deeper than that. It was on her very soul. She had touched murder and it had stained her. That is the great thing to remember. We cannot touch an evil thing but the stain goes right into our very soul. It bears the mark. Oh let us give the greatest heed to mind what we do. Let us watch what we touch. Mind the paint!

And if we have a stain, only One can wash it out. We cannot. It is no good for us to try. We must go into a quiet place where we can be alone with God, and bending before Him we must say, 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' And He has the secret, He knows the way. And though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Y

Isn't that a funny text? If it had been the other 'why'—the word which is rarely off the lips of a child—it perhaps would not have surprised you. But Y! how can that be a text? What is there to say about that? Surely nothing but what is the merest fancy of the preacher's. So you think, and perhaps so you mutter. Let us look for a moment and see.

But first, let us think of these words of one of our poets—

> The things of earth
> Are copies of the things in heaven, more close,
> More clear, more near, more intricately linked,
> More subtly, than men guess.

What does that mean? It means that the things that we see are patterns of great things that we do not see; that all this visible world, and all things in it, are parables of that great world of the invisible

which lies behind it. The water of a well represents and stands for that good with which God will satisfy the far deeper thirst of the soul; and the vine and its branches shows how intimately a man is to be connected with Jesus before he can bring forth fruit to the glory of God. My little text, then, is a parable of great things in the life of a child: it may become a pattern in our hands, by which we shall be the better able to understand those invisible things in the life of the soul. That is how I want us to think of it—it sets out great aspects of the deep life of the spirit.

I

Let us begin with this Y at the bottom, and try to climb to the very top. That is where we have to begin with most things, and that is where we should try to get in all. For a time everything is straightforward and plain, and there is no difficulty at all. But before we have gone very far we come to a fork in the road; our straight path

divides in two directions. As we stand at that point, we have to decide which way we will take. Both throw open their doors, both invite, and call and attract; but before we can go one step farther we have to choose. So our letter forces upon us the great fact of choice. It is the thing that blocks the way, that presses itself upon us, that demands consideration. Now do you know that that is exactly like life, as every one of us has to live it. For a little time the path is plain; there it lies in simple directness before our very eyes. It has no hills and no valleys; all choices are made for us, no responsibility imposes its burden upon us. Life seems so simple, so glad, so free from care. But before we have gone very far in the journey which every one of us has to take, the road forks, and choice has to be made. It cannot be evaded, it cannot be ignored, it cannot be treated as non-existent. There the ways strike off, and a decision has to be taken.

Nor is that half as insignificant as at first

sight it may appear. It is the fact that confers both greatness and glory upon each one of us. A man is a man because of this power. He can stand and survey the way of his coming, and judge it, and appraise it, and be haunted by the sense of his large responsibility for it, and be rebuked by it, and also hear its voice of sweet commendation and approval. But even deeper than that he can stand and look along the way of his going, and see the diverse ways, the different lines of conduct, and the far different issues; and with a mind full of intelligence and a heart awed by the sense of responsibility he can choose. He can say, 'I will take this way, I will do this and that'; and know all the while that the choice is his, and that the burden will be his too. In this matter he is alone, and this is what gives him his greatness, and this that confers his highest glory. His life can be self-directed, self-governed; or, better still, be directed always by the accepted wisdom of God.

And, further, it is this choice that determines the direction of all his future going. To-day the whole thing is in his hand; before him the paths lie in simple directness, each pleads its own attraction, offers its own joy, and whispers its own alluring. But when the choice has been taken, the whole way has been determined. For a time the two paths may seem to run parallel, so that associations need hardly to be broken off, and friends can call to one another over the narrow distance that divides their ways. But bit by bit the interval widens, the ways become more and more remote, until, at last, they stand as far apart as the east is from the west. That is one of our most elusive perils, the nearness of the paths, not only at their point of departure, but for some distance in the journey. Listen, boys and girls. Every one of you will have to stand at the fork in the road; you cannot help it; life will force you to that; and every one of you will have to choose. A great Psalmist who stood

at the obtrusive division of the way, stood no more, nor trusted he himself to his own wisdom; but kneeling upon his knees, he prayed this simple prayer, 'Teach me Thy way, O Lord.' And that is the only attitude and that the only prayer in which life's greatest decisions are made wisely and well.

II

But look at my text again, for it bears right upon its face another great truth—that in the great choices of life there are only two ways, and that one of these is broad and the other narrow. Now there will be many situations in your life in which you will not be so confined. Often and often a score of ways will open up before you. Each will have its own peculiar attraction, each will call you with its own sweet voice, and each will offer you its own satisfaction. But in all the deepest things, in the things that matter, two paths and two paths only strike off from a particular point, and run on in their own unimpeded

way, and reach their own certain and changeless close. One of the greatest disclosures that Jesus ever made of that vast unseen world, which lies so close about us, and in which every one of us is every day walking, was when He spoke of two paths: one with a broad way and a wide gate, at which many enter; the other way straitened and with a narrow gate, at which a few went in. It was a real discovery to us, as real as Columbus' discovery of America, or Galileo's discovery of the pendulum, and far more important. In the great things of life two ways, and only two. The soul can only have one supreme love; it must either yield itself with a passion of affection to all things that are fair and holy and good, or turn its back upon these things, and by its very love enslave itself to those things that degrade and destroy. It cannot be on both sides, it is bound to make a choice between badness and goodness. The mind can have but one supreme reverence; it must either pledge itself in an unfaltering loyalty to

truth, or by its very failure to do that put itself upon the side of untruth. There is no running with the hare and hunting with the hounds where truth is concerned; the mind has to make its lonely choice, and bear the irrevocable consequence. The heart can have but one supreme loyalty; it must pledge its unhesitating allegiance to right, and because right is right, follow it in scorn of consequence, enduring baffling and buffeting in an uncowardly spirit; or else it must be false to the greatest things that men know, and by cowardice and infidelity and a large incapacity for noble passion and endurance stoop to be the child of insincerity and the slave of unrighteousness. There is no no-man's-land here, a bit of neutral country in which we can stand and watch the conflicts, the loyalties, and the endurance, and never once be sharers in them. It is always for or against, on this side or upon that. There is no third path, and one of two has to be taken. In the Garden of Eden the choice lay between Satan and

God; on Carmel the supreme issue was Jehovah or Baal; our Lord's arrestive contrast was God and Mammon; in the judgement-hall of Pilate the decision had to be taken between Jesus or Barabbas; and in the life of every one of us the choice is always between a vivid contrast—Light and Darkness, Holiness and Sin, God and the Devil. The choice is narrow, but it must be made, and the issue in both cases has in it no single element that is uncertain. Choose ye! choose ye this day!

> Heard are the voices,—
> Heard are the Sages,
> The Worlds and the Ages:
> 'Choose well; your choice is
> Brief and yet endless.'

III

But once more may we look at my little text, and find what I think is a third bit of teaching. You may say that this is the fancy of the preacher, and perhaps it is. But to me it is very real, and perhaps it may be to some of you. 'How shall I know

which is the narrow way?' to which my text makes answer: It leadeth to the right. Look at the letter carefully, and when you stand at the point of division, the narrow path stretcheth away to the right. You never miss the right way if you keep to the right. The kingdom of goodness is all of a piece, and so is the realm of right, and so is the sphere of truth. There are no contradictions here, no cross purposes, no ways that are diverse. And every bit of truth is connected with another bit, and goodness always leads from this to that; and right makes a straight path to the full and blessed kingdom of righteousness. He that doeth the truth cometh to the light. For a brief while he may walk in the dark, and like one who is blindfolded he may grope his way in uncertainty and fear; but if he will persist in his loyalty to the truth, and hold to it with both the hands of his heart, one by one the clouds shall vanish, the morning shall break, and he shall be led into the full blaze of the cloudless day.

But right must be loved and worshipped with a reverence that is full of sincerity; and loyalty must be pledged without a thought of withdrawal, and wherever she shall lead she must be followed, and for her sake the great renunciation must be made and the great sacrifice poured out; then she shall lead the soul at last into the way of integrity and the path of peace. No man can perish in loyalty to right; that would be to turn the solid foundations of the world to rottenness, to leave the universe with an empty throne, and to break for ever the sceptre of God. Think the right, love the right, speak the right, do the right, be the right; and whatever else may come or go, this one thing is quite sure, thou shalt not miss the way that God would have thee to take, and thy peace shall flow deep and sure as a river. 'Keep innocency, and do the thing that is right, for it shall bring a man peace at the end.'

My text is a little one, and at the beginning it seemed to have very little to

say; but perhaps now it stands invested with a new meaning, and little and unimportant as it may seem, it holds the secret of deep teachings, which it were our wisdom to receive and our blessedness to heed.

The Light of the World

ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL has recently received a great enrichment. That, you think, is quite impossible, and look at me with large incredulous eyes, wondering what it can be. It is already so rich in all those things that confer wealth on a great building, that it would seem to be impossible to add to its glory. It is the last resting-place of at least two of those great national heroes the daring of whose deeds appeals to every boy's heart; and in a silence which is never broken by the clash of swords and the booming of guns, great Nelson sleeps and Wellington the lion-hearted. And beyond that, think of the great memories that cluster around its grey walls! what spectacles they have witnessed, what stories they could tell of gorgeous

pageants, of illustrious men, and of heaven-inspired deeds! For generations the nation has gathered there in its greatest and its holiest hours: now to pour out its soul in contrite penitence, and now to lift a great shout of joy in some hour of glorious deliverance. There the people have sought the guidance of high God in a day of fearful darkness, there they have sung their holiest faiths and nourished their saving ideals, there they have seen their rarest visions and made their irrevocable dedications, and there they have paid their deepest homage and pledged their uttermost loyalties. What could enrich so great a shrine? What could confer upon it a nobler distinction? Well, this!—as it seems to me. There has recently been hung upon its walls a great picture, one of the noblest painted in our time; a picture which has won the unstinted praise of them that can judge, and which appeals by its simplicity, its beauty, its directness and its power to all. The picture represents our Lord clothed

in a majesty which is sublime, standing in infinite condescension and in tender solicitude at a closed door. In one hand there hangs a lighted lamp, and the other is uplifted in knocking; for He who is the Lord of Life has stooped to its door and is seeking entrance. The whole painting is full of pity, compassion, care, desire and love, and withal there is everywhere a tender pathos that moves and shakes the heart. As I stood—I know not for how long—thoughts arose in my mind, and memories, and deep feelings, and as I moved away I pondered these things in my heart. To-day, let me try to tell these things to you.

I

The first thing that moved me was the tender sadness of the closed door. It ought not to have been closed. It had been open, and open to Christ. His feet had trodden its threshold as a familiar place, and once every part of the House of Life had been open to Him. Every latch answered to

His touch, no bolt anywhere had shut Him out, He had sat in every one of its spacious halls, He had hung sweet pictures upon all its walls, and He had been its most radiant light and its one sufficing joy. But some one had sown enmity between the heart and its Lord, and it had fallen out of love with its best Friend. And the soul had grown cold, and less and less could it look Jesus in the face, and less and less did it desire His fellowship, and wider and wider was the division, until at last He was put outside, and the door was shut. There was nothing sudden about it, nor anything that was rude; it was only that love's fire was unfed, and, by slow degrees, the blazing hearth was changed into a handful of dull, dead, grey ashes.

Before you can take Jesus in, you must have shut Jesus out. That is the strange tragedy that lies hidden in this beautiful picture. The heart of the Suppliant is longing and pleading for a love which He has lost. It is the pathos of a

mother seeking for the love of her own child. It is a husband reaching out for the love of his wife, which some bitter, cruel thing has destroyed. It is the plaintive cry of a friend as he longs for the lost affection of his friend. They have had the love once, once they possessed the life. But life's supreme tragedy has come and love has been shut out. That, surely, is one of the tenderest sights that this world can afford; it arrests us and shakes us with the power of a revelation. If to-day Jesus is outside the door of life, if to-day He appeals to us for entrance, it is we, and no other, who have shut Him out. Perhaps we found His presence too much of a restraint. There were thoughts that we wanted to think, that we dare not, we could not think when He was near. Or we cherished plans and purposes and intentions that we could not bear Him to see, for the light of His eyes hurt us—with a godly hurt, if we could only have known it. Or it may be that we simply disregarded Him.

We did not exactly wish Him to go, but we could not be expected to give Him all our time. We had a thousand interests, and all of them were not His. And so He was allowed to sit in the lower rooms of the house, unrecognized, except in a quite casual way. Or it may be that we were simply thoughtless—we forgot! There He was!—but our eyes were full of a thousand bright and glittering things, and our hands were stretched out to grasp them, and, not thinking, we filled our hearts with other interests and loves and desires, until, at last, there was no room left for Him. And He, who could wait so long, was pushed to the door, and the door was shut.

No boy shuts Jesus out of his life but he darkens every room in the house, its sweetest music is all silenced and his soul sits by a stringless lyre, and all the fairest visions fade away. No girl leads Jesus to the door, and shuts it behind Him, but goes back to find the house of her life made infinitely poor; the soul-satisfying pictures

have faded from the frames that hang upon the wall, its peace is broken, its light quenched, its glory vanished. Boys and girls, look upon the picture, and say in your deepest heart that it shall never be true of you. Christ never shall be shut out. He shall never ask for a love which has been withdrawn; but from your earliest days the door of your life shall answer to His merest touch. He has only to speak, indeed whisper, and you will hear. He shall have the freedom of every room; the whole house shall be filled with His glory. There is no need for Jesus ever to be a suppliant to your door, because He has never been outside.

II

The second thing that I saw was the splendour of the central Figure, and the deep tenderness that brooded over all. But let there be no mistake. It is quite true that the great Figure is of commanding and gracious mien, and that there is something superb in the glory of it. But that

is not quite what I mean by its splendour. I remembered who He was that stood there, and I thought of the life that was a stranger to His presence, and I had a sense of the tragedy of the closing of the door, whether it was in clanging noise or in quiet silence. And I thought of His solicitude and condescension and desire, and of the long way He had come, and of the persistence of His quest, of His never-wearying patience and entreaty and eagerness. I looked up into His face, and pity brooded there, and there was no anger but only a great desire, and in His eyes I saw the pathos of His unsatisfied longing, and from His brow there blazed the glory of His greatness. It all seemed to me so noble, so gracious, so good, and that is what I mean by its splendour. It is not a matter of flesh and drapery, but of soul and love.

I saw Him lifting His hand to knock, and my heart whispered—How near He is! That to me is one of the arrestive things in the situation, whether I read it in immortal

story or see it in undying picture—How near! He does not call us across wide chasms of infinite distance, but in lowliness and love He travels over all the long way that we have set between Him and us, and He comes so near that He can put His hand upon the very door of life—of my life—and knock. It is true that He is outside, but there is only a door between Him and me. It is as though He would say, 'There will come a day when he, whom My heart loves, will want Me, and will perhaps open the door of life to look out for Me—then he shall find that I am always near.' That is a haunting thought, and subdues the soul that thinks it into quietness and reverence, and then into deepening awe. The Lord is at hand. In my waywardness and wilfulness, in my thoughtfulness and coldness, in my intoxication and delirium, in my silence and sadness, my wistfulness and despair, when the lights fade and the glory vanishes—always, always near. And if I would hearken, I should hear upon the

door of life the knock that tells of His solicitude and speaks His infinite love.

'And I looked again, and the silence seemed to be broken by a voice; it was 'a sound of gentle stillness,' such as great Elijah heard, and it pleaded for the opening of the door. 'And again my heart whispered —How patient He is! No strong forth-putting of boundless power, no summoning of the innumerable legions to force the door and to make the way of His going. 'My love, it is my own, nor can it ever be torn from me, but given, as true love needs must be given freely.' So He patiently pleads, and entreats, and waits; with long patience does He look for the day when the soul will come to itself and will instinctively look for the natural Object of its love to satisfy its deepest longing and its imperishable desire. If to-day Christ is outside, He is quite near—near enough to touch, near enough to be heard; and with a patience that is never out-worn, and wearies not of its long quest, He invites us

to lift the latch, and let in Him who gives to life its depth, its blessedness, and its power.

III.

A third thing came to me, and it came on this wise. Speechless, I stood gazing upon that dumb, eloquent picture, with I know not what looks in my face, when a voice said to me, 'Do you notice, sir, that there is no handle upon the door? And I answered, 'Yes.' 'When the painter had painted the picture,' said my interrogator, 'he submitted it to the judgement of a friend. "But you have put no handle on the door," said he. "No," replied the painter, "for the door of life has only one handle, and that is inside!"' And I fell a-thinking. I had often heard the preacher say that; I had often said it myself; but it never seemed quite so vivid, so real, as it did in that hour. The handle of the door of life is on the inside. So that if I was the one who shut Him out, I—I only—could be the one to let Him in.

There is a sense of awfulness in a great truth like that. It confers responsibility upon life, and fills it with heart-shaking meaning. Jesus has such deep respect for the person of each one of us that He will do nothing to interfere with its free choice. That it must exercise in the lonely places of its own life. There He will stand, repeating the story of His undying love. He will tell of God's gracious solicitude and eager desire. He will show the certain defeat and misery of the life in which He has no part; how it reaches out in strong desires and grasps but a handful of mist, how it follows in the long quest only to find that it has pursued a will-o'-the-wisp. He will set out the great things that make for beauty and goodness, and tell of their deep satisfactions and strong supports. He will call and challenge, and entreat and knock, and bid the soul awaken from its perilous sleep, and hearken and obey. But beyond that He will not go. The life that will be His in reverent love and pledged

loyalty and daring obedience, must itself lift the latch and open the door. Nobody can do it for him. Others may urge and plead and persuade, but last of all the act is his—his is its privilege and his its responsibility. Every life is set in a pathetic loneliness, it is cut off from all others; in its decisions lie the making of a character, and in its lonely work the formation of a destiny. Christ stands outside the door of life, and I am inside, and there is but one handle, and that is near to me.

Holman Hunt's picture is a great work of art. But it is infinitely more. It sets out great situations in human life, it is full of its deepest power. It stretches out its invisible hands and touches each one of us. That closed door that shuts the good Lord out may be a picture of me. Christ is outside my life. It is true He is calling and entreating and knocking, but He is outside. That is why it is sometimes so dark, so cold, and so silent. I will arise and let Him in. Feeling my way through the house, by

the light that streams through the windows from His face, I will open wide the door, and say, 'Come in, dear Lord, come in.' And since He has stood so long, and my need is so deep, I will do it now.

The Golden Age

Thou art rich.—Rev. ii. 9.

And in the very moment when I read that word, I think I can hear you say, 'Rich!—that is just exactly what we are not. It may be true of our fathers, and of some of our friends, but of us it is distinctly untrue.' But that is because when you use the word 'rich,' and Jesus uses it, you do not mean exactly the same thing. When you use it you think of piles of glittering gold, but when Jesus uses it He is thinking of far more valuable things —of love and privilege and honour, of opportunity and sincerity, of ability and service, for these are the true wealth, and to have these makes a boy rich indeed. When Sunday by Sunday we pray that God will keep our King in wealth, we do not mean that He will give him plenty

of money, but that he may be kept in welfare. The people to whom Jesus spoke these words had many dark things in their lives; as men look at things they were stricken with poverty. But Jesus sees the deeper things, the things that give real glory to life, and for their comfort He says, 'I know, I know it all, for I have seen it all,—but thou art rich!'

I

It is always very interesting to watch a boy or a girl looking for his treasures. Usually he does not know where they are to be found. He is looking into his pockets, or perhaps is turning out a drawer, and one often overhears the surprised cry: 'I never knew that I had that!—I had forgotten!' So to-day I want you quietly to sit down and look and see what great things you have. Do not think of what you want, but of what you have, and what great things they are, and how rich they really make you.

1. You are rich in time. It often seems to me that old Father Time is very parsimonious, and to none of us does he give over-much of his sacred treasure. And what he does give he gives so carefully, and doles it out so sparingly, and he never gives us two seconds at a time. But this is certainly true of you, that most of your time you have yet to have. You can stand on the Lees at Folkstone and just at the foot of the cliff rolls the deep sea. It is so near that you could throw a stone into it. Or you can stand on Box Hill, in Surrey, and when the day is very bright, you can throw your eye over fifty miles of lovely downs, and there through a narrow gap in the hill, you can see the sea laughing as the sun smites its face. The waters are so far away that only now and again can they be seen at all.

Some people are quite near to the great sea, into which at last the boat must be pushed, and gradually fade away from those who watch on the shore. They can

often see its sullen face, and hear its deep pathetic moan. But you look over vast stretches of life, and only now and again catch fitful visions of its face, and even then it has no terrors and causes you no fears. Some of you are rich, very rich, in time.

Now time is a great gift. Without it you can do nothing: with it hardly anything is impossible. But whatever else you do in it, and whatever else you get out of it, set your heart upon three fine things. Time is our one chance for a wise mind, a tender heart, and a pure soul. These are the great things, and to miss these is to miss the best of all. But while you have plenty of time you have none to spare. Duty and opportunity are equally matched, they fit one another. There is no second to waste, no single hour to squander. The night may seem far off, but the unwearied sun rests not, but ever climbs the high ascent of heaven, and then passes quite certainly to its setting. We may see no

gathering clouds, but the night cometh. Still you are rich,—in time.

2. You are rich in opportunities. 'What,' you say, 'is an opportunity?' An opportunity is just the chance of doing a beautiful thing for the love of God and for the good of man. Here is an illustration. A Jew was going from Jerusalem to Jericho, a way of danger and uncertainty. And as he went he fell among thieves, and they stripped him and robbed him of all that he had. And then they left him by the roadside, bleeding and nearly dead, and without power or a merciful friend. That was a chance,—an opportunity for any man who came that way and had a tender heart, to shew pity and kindness, and sympathy and love.

Now it chanced that two men went that way. One was a Priest and the other was a Levite. And they saw the man in his pain and sorrow, and without heed they passed on. They had a chance and missed it. The door was open, but they did not

enter. There was a call, but they did not respond. Presently there came a man who was a Samaritan: who hated Jews and was hated by them. And when he saw the man, a great pity stirred in his heart and a great love moved him, and he placed himself at the stricken man's service, and he did all he could to help him. The door of opportunity was open and he entered: there was a loud call and he heard it and responded. That is what opportunity is, and that story shows the different ways in which it may be met.

But children, hearken: Your whole life will be, is, rich in fine opportunities. There will be many little ones, and one really big one. But all the little ones will serve the big one and help it. And the big one is life's opportunity of giving yourself—your very self—to Jesus Christ. At play and at school, at work and in the street, at home and at church,—everywhere, always, the door of opportunity stands wide open to you. And you must be ready to enter in.

One of the most pathetic things I have ever seen in my life was a man who was eighty-five, and as great tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks, he said to me,' I did not begin to love Jesus until I was eighty. Five years only have I served Him, eighty years have I lost!' He saved his soul, but he had lost his life. You too can be saved at the last, there is that hope lest we should despair. But all the rich, full days we can lose, because we do not see what treasures they carry, because we do not try to understand what they mean. They are vast opportunities. We must turn them into real things.

3. You are rich in talents. Isn't it funny how words change their meaning? When Jesus came a talent was just a piece of silver,—that, and nothing more. But our Lord used to take words, and lift them up and fill them with larger meaning and touch them with a rarer beauty, and give them a vaster power. He did that with such words as peace, and humility and love, as you

will find out as you get older. And He did that with this word ' talent,' and He made it to stand for a great gift of mind or heart or hand or soul. And so to-day we speak of a talented boy, or a talented girl, and we say that they are rich, and we do not mean that they have lots of silver and gold, but that they are wealthy in finer gifts, the gifts of mind and heart.

I should like you to sit down and read the great story which Jesus told about talents. And when you read it remember that behind the figure of the lord who gave the talents, there stands the greater Figure of God. It is He who calls us to Himself, and gives us our gifts. We are entrusted by Him with things which are valuable, which are His. They are not given outright: they are lent, and lent for use. And one day, when we do not know, like a thief coming in the night, He will reckon with those to whom He has lent His gifts.

To great Raphael God gave the gift of painting, to Shakespeare the gift of

exquisite song, to Handel the gift of captivating music, to St John the gift of a heart that was full of a tender and beautiful love, to a boy or girl in your school the gift of genius. These did not boast of their gifts, or get vain or proud, for they felt that they were God-given. They were not theirs, their very own, but His. And do you look! You have got a talent, a gift of God's, something that belongs to Him, and which He has lent to you. It may be a touch of beauty, a sweet disposition, a voice that is full of music, eyes that are the homes of silent prayers. But whatever it is, it is God's, and it is to be used for Him. And for it, at the last, you will have to give account to Him. You are rich in opportunities.

Now this, in part, is what Jesus means by this little text of mine: this is what it means to you. No life is altogether poor. It may want a great many things which most men prize. But deep down, at its very heart, it has great wealth. It has far more than

any of us think. In any case, set this in your heart now, whisper it to yourselves as you leave God's house to-day. My life is rich in time, in opportunities, in talents. And do you try, day by day, to value them more, and always to use them to the very full.

II

'Thou art rich.' Yes, you are rich. But what are you going to do with your wealth? All things that we can see and touch are shadows of things that are unseen and cannot be touched and handled. And the ways that wise men act with the things that are seen, are often parables of the way of wisdom about the deeper unseen things. And so, perhaps, if we study what men do who want to use the wealth of this world wisely, we shall find what we ought to do with the rarer wealth, that makes us so exceeding rich. Unwise or timid men and women sometimes keep their money under the bed, or put it in an old stocking, or hide it away in the chimney. But that is

not the way of wise men. That is not what they do who want to use their money to the best advantage.

In that great story of our Lord's, of which I have spoken, Jesus said the very severest things of him who simply wrapped his talent in a napkin, and hid it away in the earth unused. A seed may be set in the earth and it will grow, but a sovereign may be there for ever, as dead as a stone, and never grow at all. Money is not multiplied that way. The man with his talent must go up with it into the world, he must stand in the market-place, he must trust it, venture it, use it. Then it will increase and grow and multiply. But if he hold it, and is afraid, and does not use it, in the very first hour he will begin to lose it.

And that is exactly what happens with life's highest riches. They are not different from any other wealth. God has entrusted to you three great gifts,—Time, Opportunity, Talent. And if you use them they will daily give to your life a larger wealth.

But if you do not use them they will be taken from you, and your life will grow shallow and thin and poor. The wide-open door will close. The voice that calls will grow fainter and fainter. And bit by bit you will lose every gift with which your life has been endowed.

God has given to you the gift of Time, say School-Time—the great years that lie between seven and sixteen. There they stretch before you in fair beauty, days that are full of brightness and mirth, of play and frolic. But days also of high seriousness, of hard work, of great decisions, of acts the consequences of which will travel with you to the very end of your days. I think they are the most decisive years of life. Use them well, and you will lay the foundations of noble wisdom and lofty character. But fail to use them, and their glory never returns, and you will be lower and farther behind for ever as the result of nothing but neglect. In after years you may always wear a good coat, and always

have a good dinner. But the great things that once were possible are possible no more, their fair glory has faded like a quenched light. In nothing, perhaps, do we suffer so much, or suffer with a keener bitterness, than for the neglect to use the time which was ours, and in which we might have done such noble things. Success may come to us, but even that fails to satisfy a life that feels that it is not doing the highest things of which once it was quite certain it was capable.

Or think again of the golden opportunities with which every single day of life has been crowded. There has been no day without its chance, no hour that has not been the messenger of a shining possibility. Here again, the same thing is true. It is the use of opportunity that creates its value. And it is the neglect of opportunity that more and more unfits the life for all the gathering chances, and leaves it stripped of all beauty and power for great and holy things. There is a great

word in our Lord's fine story, which has in it such deep wisdom and is so true to life as we know it. 'They that were ready went in . . . and the door was shut.' Readiness is one of life's first qualities. Does it hear the voices, see the open door? Can it use the opportunities? Has it fitted itself to respond to all the challenges, can it meet the demands? If not, the greatest opportunities do but deepen the misery of the defeat.

And so it is with our talent. The very minute we begin to use it, it begins to grow. That is always the way, and the only way, of its multiplication. And the very hour when we cease to use it, it begins to decay: that is the way of its loss. If you have a gift for speaking kind words, of being one of the world's encouragers, every time you speak such words your lips and heart are trained in a very gracious service, and your usefulness will be deepened and extended. But every day you fail and miss your chance, and leave your

gift unused, your lips will falter in their high ministry, and at the last the power of generous speech will fail you, and your talent with which you could have done so much will be lost. There are fishes in the Mammoth Cave who are sightless. Eyes they have, but not sight. The cave is dark and they had no use for their eyes, and they ended by losing them altogether. And in the world there are men who have eyes but they do not see, and ears but they do not hear. They have not plucked their eyes out nor torn their ears away, they have not used them, and to-day the glory has faded and all the music is silenced. It is a great thing to have a talent: but life's tragedy often lies in its neglect, and its finest glory in its faithful use.

To-day as you leave God's house, keep on whispering to yourself: 'I am rich! I am rich!' Look into your face and mind and hands and heart, and see what treasures you possess. And when the evening

curtains the world with the dark, bend reverently before God, and ask Him to show you your wealth, and to teach you how to use it aright. All wealth is a great and dangerous gift, and only he can use it well who learns how to do so in the love and service of Jesus Christ our Lord.

My Watch

When I want a text I almost always look for it in a book. To-day I have brought mine in my pocket. My pocket is like a boy's, it would greatly amuse you if I were to turn it out, it has a great many very strange things in it. And I am sure there are quite half a score from which I could preach to you a little sermon. But my text to-day is quite a little thing, it has no very great value, but it has one great task and one great quality, and day and night without ceasing for a single second, it does one thing, and only one, and does it well. It never troubles about a single other thing, it does not ask how it looks, it does not ask what people think of it, it does not say that it is tired and it has no holiday, it does not ask to be brought into the light and to be

set in a prominent place; but without haste and hurry, or slowness or delay, it does that which it has to do. It has no envy of the work of others, nor any pride of its own: it simply bends all its strength to one thing, and it does it well.

What a great lesson this is, at the very beginning, for every one of us! What a different world this would be if everybody would do his bit of work, and do it to the very best of his ability! Whether his work were big or little, important or unimportant, whether he had to manage a state or only sweep out a shop or mind a door, he would do it in the best way that he could, so that it would be impossible for him to add to it a touch of grace or of power. What envy would perish and what pride, what meddling would cease and what friction; and how splendidly life would move, if every man simply filled his own place, and did his own work! Now that is just what my watch does. It never wants to be a stud or a shoelace, a hat or a coat: it does not

ask to do the work of a brush or a stick, it simply is a watch, and it is content to do the work of a watch and to do it well. To-day I want you to be very still, for my watch talks, and I want you to hear what it has to say. I never hear it talk but it always says something to which I should be better if I gave heed. I do not mean its ticking, though that speaks a great truth, the truth of tireless persistence, of faithfulness at all times. It has a deeper voice than that, it says quite other things, and I want you to listen while it speaks some of its great words to-day.

I

And first, I ask my watch: 'What is your great purpose in life?—what were you made for?—what is the work you have to do?' And it makes a very simple answer: 'I have only one thing to do, but that I have to do quite accurately, and that is to tell the right time!' Now look at that watch. It isn't an expensive one. Years

ago—and it has been my constant friend ever since—it only cost me five shillings. But as the boy said when some one chided him upon his poor suit, 'This isn't the one that I have at home!' But the value of a watch does not depend on its value as silver or gold: nor in any diamonds with which it may be enriched. Nor is it for ornament, though one might sometimes think so, seeing the place where some girls carry theirs. Its purpose is very simple. It is made for one thing, and for one thing only,—to tell the time. And it has to do that correctly, and always to be depended upon, and never to be asleep, but always to let its two little fingers be in the right place and be doing the right thing. It may be many other things, and do many other things, but if it does not do this, it fails. It may be of the purest gold, it may be very richly engraved, it may be jewelled in many holes, it may bear the monogram of a king set in the costliest diamonds; but as a watch, it fails utterly, if it does not

tell the exact time. That is its one great standard, that is its one complete test.

Stamped into the very heart of this watch, and written all over its face, there is one great purpose. Is there any such purpose set upon the life of a boy and of a girl? Has the watch a simple end, one that everybody can see, and is that not true of a child and of a man? Listen! for if we are very still and hearken, God will tell us why we were made, and what is the one great purpose of our lives. Speaking of man this is what He says: 'I have created him for My glory.' There is the purpose, that is the end. That is why we were sent into the world, that is the work that we have to do. Not a thousand things, all difficult to understand and hard to do, —but one thing, and that very simple. My life is to be so true that it shall correspond to the life of God and shall reveal the deep truthfulness of His heart. My mind and heart are to be so pure that men cannot help but see in them a reflection of the

whiteness of God. My conduct is to be so right that through it men shall see the straightness of the Lord. My thoughts, looks, words and actions are to be so gentle, kind and beautiful, that men cannot help but see their likeness to the life of Jesus. That is life's great end: the end that swallows up all others, and makes them seem little and unimportant. That is the only thing that deeply matters. We may do a great many other beautiful things, but if we fail here, we really fail altogether. You may get very rich and have everything that wealth can purchase, you may get to a high station and when you grow older stand out before men, you may be cultured, and learning may stamp you with her grace and power, you may do a deed that one day shall challenge the attention of the world. But if your life is not lived for the glory of God, if you do not live to show His spirit and to make His name known, then in the highest thing of all, the thing for which life

was made, you have failed. Other things do not count in comparison of this. The fingers on the face of a watch must correspond to the movement of the sun in the sky, all else does not greatly matter in comparison of that. And every child's life, the very least as well as that of him who is bigger, must answer, bit by bit, to the pattern which God has given, and to that purpose which He has impressed on all our life.

II

But sometimes my watch goes wrong. Perhaps I have forgotten to wind it up before going to bed—for it must be attended to every day—and then it stops altogether. Or it has become dirty, and so deranged, and then it will tell the wrong time. It will point to six when it is actually eight: or to twelve when it is ten. Then it is unreliable, not to be depended on, and it will give me trouble. I shall go to catch a train and find that it has just gone,

or I shall be at the station long before the train is timed to start. The other day I was staying in a strange home, and when I wakened in the morning, I looked at my watch and found that it was seven o'clock. It was winter time, and I knew that people did not want visitors about the house at that time of day, so I slept a little longer. I wakened with a start, looked at my watch again, and found that it was still seven. I made haste and got up, and went to breakfast, only to find that I was late. My watch was wrong, and that threw me wrong, and that threw some others wrong beside.

Now is there anything like that in our lives? Do we ever go wrong, and not only be wrong ourselves, but create wrongness in the lives of others? Let us look and see. Here is a boy whose words do not correspond to the facts of a case, he does not speak the truth. He seems to be something which he is not. The fingers on the face of his soul are pointing to eight when

it is ten: or to nine when it is seven. There is something wrong inside. Here is a girl who is full of bitterness. When she speaks she tries to pain and to hurt. Her eyes are full of lightnings, her words are like daggers and are intended to be. She is wrong, quite wrong! Here is a child who has ceased to try to please Jesus: who does not try to fill his thoughts with His thoughts, his lips with His tender speech, and his hands with His beautiful service. He does not love, he does not obey, he does not serve. Like my watch, he has stopped. Last night, perhaps, all of these did not do for their spirit what the winding does for the watch. They did not read and think about some great and gracious word of the Bible, and then bend in lowly, reverent prayer for God's grace and strength. Or the boy or girl has got some of the grit and dirt of the world mixed up with the finer parts of life, and it has deranged the accurate working of character. Some are too fast and some are too slow.

One speaks before he thinks, and strikes almost before he knows. St. Peter did that on that fearful night when he betrayed our Lord. He betrayed Him first and thought after: he should have thought first and then very likely he would not have betrayed Him at all. And one does not see until the opportunity has gone. He sees when it is too late. The three disciples whom Jesus took with Him into the garden of Gethsemane were like that. When the fierce agony of Jesus was overpast they felt that they could have watched with Him for ever, but then it was too late, the opportunity was gone, the door was shut. Thus boys and girls go wrong, and then they are not reliable, people say, they can't depend on them, and so a great part of their use to the world has gone.

That is not all. My watch, if it is wrong, misleads me. And it makes me to mislead others. And they mislead others. It is like casting a stone into a pool, you never know when the influence will end. Mischief

causes mischief. As I went along the street the other day I saw a fruiterer picking out the few bad apples out of a barrel of good ones. Why did he do that? Because he knew that every bad apple was helping to make bad every apple that it touched. Nothing could prevent that. That badness stretched out its invisible fingers and touched the good apple and made it bad. And if he had not minded it would not have been long before every apple in the barrel had been bad. And so it is with boys and girls. No boy can be bad without his making it easier for others to be bad. He shows them the way, he draws them into that way, and he helps to corrupt their life at the very fountain. A watch that is wrong sets me out of the true relation to things. I go about in a false world. I think I have plenty of time when I am short of time. I run when I could quite easily walk. I do not know where I am. And he that lets himself be guided by a boy who is wrong is teaching his own

feet to go in wrong ways, and wrong ways always end in defeat and sorrow.

III

But now last of all. To whom am I to take my watch when it is wrong in order that it may be put right? I hear you say—To a shop! Very well! I will go to the first I come to. And I say, 'Mr. Baker, my watch is wrong, and I want you to look at it, and put it right!' 'But why,' he says, 'do you bring it to me? I bake bread, and I know nothing at all about watches.' So I go to the next shop, and I say, 'I have brought you my watch, it is broken, and I want it mended.' The man looks at me with blank astonishment, and he says, 'I am a gas fitter: I do not mend watches. I lay on the gas, I attend to the lights.' Then, 'to a shop' is not the correct answer to the question as to where I must take a broken watch. Let us try again. To whom shall I take it? 'To the man who made it!' Yes! that is the answer. I will go

along the street until I come to a shop that has on the window these words, 'Watch and Clock Maker.' Then I will go in and say, 'My watch is wrong, it does not go properly; will you please put it right?' And he has no doubt. Fixing a little black-looking thing in his eye, and taking the watch to a bright light, he searches it, not outside, but right inside. Then he says, 'Leave it with me, I will attend to it, I will make it all right.' And he takes it to bits, and mends all the parts, and cleans it, and sets every bit of it again in its right place. And after a time he returns it to me, and it is as good as ever.

And when you and I go wrong, to whom shall we go? You laughed a moment ago when I talked of taking my watch to a baker to be mended. You said to yourself, 'How stupid! of course it is no good to take a watch to a baker,—what can he do with it?' Yes, it would be stupid. But it is not less stupid to take a man who is wrong, and who knows he is wrong, to the places

where some people go for healing. They have a strange numbness, a heart-ache, a deep thirst that nothing seems to satisfy, a longing which nothing can meet. They will try excitement! So they whirl in a round of pleasure, and go here and there, and try this and that, and see if they can forget. But they very soon find that there is neither relief nor help there. Where, then, shall we go? I took my watch to the man who made it. Should I not take myself to the Lord, whose I am, who made me, who knows me through and through, who understands me altogether. I will creep quite close into His presence, and kneeling near to Him, I will say, 'Lord, I am Thine, save me!' 'Heal me, O Saviour, and make me whole of my hurt.' 'My heart is stained; be pleased, O God, to make me clean.' And I will wait with Him, as my watch waits at the watchmaker's, until He puts His hand upon me, and makes me whole. I have no misgiving, for He says, 'Him that cometh to Me, I

will in no wise cast out.' I am quite certain, for I hear Him asking, 'What wilt thou that I shall do for thee?' and He does not provoke great prayers but that He may meet them with great answers. He can make me right, and He can keep me right, and He will.

Now that is a bit of the teaching of my little watch. When I look into its face, I often hear it speaking. Right in the rush of a busy street, when I am getting bewildered it says, 'I have only one thing to do and I am always doing it'; and my duty stands out clean and distinct, and I feel I must be about it. And I find my steps begin to hasten, for I fear lest a little bit of machinery should be more faithful than I who am a son of God. I must keep clear cut before my eyes life's high and holy purpose, its single and simple end. And when I feel that I have failed, and try again, and again fail, I hear it say, 'There is only One who can help you, and it is He who made you!' and through my

heart there moves a strange music, and as I hearken I know it is the wistful voice of Him who says: 'Come unto Me, weary, tired and sad hearts, and I will give you rest.' And being with Him, He sets me right again and restores to me my lost joy.

The Ruddy Boy of the Beautiful Countenance

Now David was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.—1 SAM. xvi. 12.

THE picture of David is painted in black and white. There are some very dark, black things in his life. The Bible is a real book, and it does not hide them. It holds them forth that everybody can see them and be guarded by them. There is no need for me to speak of them to-day: they are not a boy's sins: and when you get older you will see what they are, and you will also see that David had a life-long sorrow for them. They were once done, but they were never done with. But there are some very shining things in his life: they seem to have been made of sunlight, and they shine like stars in a dark night. He sang some deathless songs, he was full of courage, he was very generous, a true and faithful friend,

a man who did the most beautiful things, indeed who did some deeds that the world never will forget. But to-day I want to think of his boyhood, I want to tell how he was chosen of God, and why.

From the descriptions that are given of him he must have been a real boy—healthy, wholesome, clean, sweet, with the breath of God upon his cheeks and the light of purity in his eyes. He was frank and honest and true: he did not lend his mind to be the place of bad thoughts, nor give his lips to the speaking of unkind and ungenerous words. He thought purely, he lived truly. It would be good to be near to him, good to hear his hearty laugh, to feel his buoyant strength, to have him for a friend. Let me say three simple things about him to day.

I

God chose him, while yet a boy, to be a king. Saul, you remember, was king, but he was not a good king. He heard the voice of God, but he did not obey it.

He knew God's words, but he did not keep them. And so, when he was tested of God —for God tries all men—he was 'rejected.' Is not that a fearful word, and is it not a far more fearful thing? Rejected! God cannot use us when we will not do His will, we do not fit into His plans, He has no place for us. And so He rejects us,—lays us aside, as a workman does a tool, as unfit, and takes up another and uses him in our place. That was what God did to Saul. He was not fit for his purpose, and so He took him from his throne and laid him aside. Then God in heaven chose for king a lad who was minding a few sheep in the wilderness, and sent Samuel, His prophet, to Bethlehem to seek him out, to tell him of God's choice and to anoint him as king.

Now is not that wonderful? God chose him—the great Lord of heaven had him in His thought and heart—and said, That is he, I want him to be My servant. And He chose him while he was a boy. He did

not wait until he grew to be a man, and was big and strong. But while he was young and little and tender the voice came, and he heard and hearkened. It is wonderful. And yet that is exactly what happens in the life of every one of us. All the great voices speak to us while we are young: it is then that all the great choices have to be made.

God chooses us. He calls us. Life is a 'vocation' (which is only a bigger word for call) as our grandfathers used to say. We are not all called to the same thing, nor are we all called in quite the same way. But we are all called. One boy is called to what we think to be a great position, another is called, perhaps, always to stand in the shade. One girl every one will know, another will be known by none. But all are called, called to do a work, to speak a word, to fill a place. And the work is great, whatever it be, and the place is sacred, wherever it be, because God has called us to it and He wants us to be there.

Your work is not something that you have to do for bread, but which you have to do for the high glory of God. And you must mind that you do not think so much of the bread that you forget the glory. Some people do, and so God misses a noble servant, and they miss a deep and abiding joy.

And God makes this choice of us while we are young. He does not wait until we stand in all our strength, with great powers ready to His service. But while we are little and feeble and unknown He chooses and calls. Little people should always be standing a-tip-toe, listening for the call of God, for it is to them that He is always speaking. Samuel was but a child and was girded with a linen ephod when the voice of God rang through the silence of the darkened Temple, and he heard his very name, Samuel! Samuel! Isaiah was quite a young man when one day in the Temple he heard a voice that somehow seemed to shake his heart. And as he listened he

looked up into the very face of God, and he said: 'Here am I, send me! send me!' Saul of Tarsus was young when God stopped him on the way to Damascus, and he cried out to Jesus, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' And so God's call will come to us. All our greatest choices, our biggest decisions, have to be made while we are little. And that great choice, the choice between good and evil, the choice that governs everything, has to be made while we are young.

Listen! Listen! boys and girls, Listen! Listen now! God is speaking in these days. He is calling you. He wants you to be His servants. He wants you to be His trusty friends. Often He speaks, as He did to Elijah, with a voice which is 'a sound of gentle stillness.' It is His voice. He wants you, perhaps, to be a missionary, a preacher, a doctor, a nurse. He wants you not to live for money-making, but for service: not for yourself but for others, to heal the hurt of His children and to

bring them good. And He is choosing us, for our work, to-day. He is calling, calling, now.

II

What were the grounds upon which God chose him? There was a man whose name was Jesse, and he had eight sons, and God sent His prophet Samuel to look for the future king among them. And first of all he saw Eliab, who was tall and stately and beautiful. He looked every inch a king, as though he were born to wear purple clothing and a golden crown. And almost before he knew it, he said: 'Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him.' And God said: 'Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature.' Then came Abinadab and Shammah. And Samuel said, 'Neither of these is he.' Then four other sons were brought, and the prophet was sure that none of these were to be the king. 'Are these all?' said Samuel. Then they bethought them of the ruddy boy of the beautiful countenance, the lad that

minded the sheep. 'Send and fetch him,' said Samuel; and after a while, fresh from his work among the hills, David was brought.

How did God judge? How does God judge? Half a verse tells us that for ever. God gave the true way of judgement to Samuel in a single sentence. 'For the Lord seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.' Men judge by what they see with their eyes. They are captured by size, by beauty, by wealth, by power, by station—by things that are outward. But it is not size that makes a man. It is not looks that make a man. It is not clothes that make a man. It is not wealth that makes a man. Nor is it the highness of his position that makes a man. That is measuring things by what they look to be. The real measurement of men is by what they are. It is never quite easy to remember that, but we never get a really true judgement until we do. It is not in things that are

outward at all that real greatness lies, but in those hidden things, the things of the soul. It is there that God looks. He sees all those things that are hidden away in the mind, in the heart, in the soul, and it is by these that He judges. The outward appearance is nothing as compared with the beauty of a man's character.

In one of his great Letters, St. Paul speaks of 'the hidden man of the heart.' That is the real man. And that is where God sees. His searching eyes go down behind the tinsel, and the bits of ribbon, and the pipe-clay, and the decorations, and they search out the hidden things of the very heart. He walks with him in the lonely places of His life, He takes the measurements of his secret soul. That is the man. Not the beautiful face, but the wise mind. Not the big body, but the heart that is all aflame with love, that feels with people's sorrows and tries to help them to carry their load. Not the beautiful dress, but that spirit that is adorned with rich

graces and girded and made strong with truth. The real treasure is of the heart. It is love and kindness, and sympathy and sincerity, and courage and goodness that count. These are the things that make men great: by these they live and in these are they strong.

A boy should be beautiful without. Nothing should cause a girl to be slovenly. She should be fond of a bit of ribbon, a beautiful feather, a nice dress. But we must never mistake these for ourselves. We are not good because we are pretty. We are not great because we are strong. We may make a striking figure before a looking-glass, especially in our own eyes: but it does not follow that we look well in the sight of God. What we are is what God thinks about. And if we would be pleasing to Him we must give heed to the inner man, he who is hidden from the eyes of men, but who is always seen by God. We must be pure, and true, and upright, having a heart that is always sincere, and then

when God looks into our life, He will always be pleased, and will use us for the doing of His will, and for the glory of His holy Name. And that is the greatest honour that ever came to man, woman, or child.

III

And now think of this third thing. God wanted David for a king, and He chose him and called him. How did He prepare him for this kingship? For really, in all past years God had been preparing him for this great hour. That was the meaning of everything: that set everything in its proper place. In the light of that everything would be understood. He would see the meaning now of that which before was dark: and things which had perplexed him would now be quite clear.

Really we never leave school. We think that we do, and sometimes in our impatience long for the day to come when we shall put our lessons down. But teaching is more than grammar and writing and

doing sums. Lessons are more than those in sewing and house-work. Life is a great school. In it we are taught every day some of the very deepest things, and it is whether we have learned these that determines our fitness for the task which life will give us to do. It has many class rooms, and it is in these that the same lessons are always taught, though it may be in a different way. David was prepared for kingship under the dome of the silent stars, among the quiet loneliness of the hills. He learned to fulfil the highest duties by the faithful discharge of the simple duties of a shepherd-boy. King George the Fifth learned the first lessons of kingship in the stoke-hole of a ship, as she traversed the unknown paths of the great sea. No princely glory saved him from dirt and drudgery and hardness, because his father knew that it is only in doing well quite ordinary things that men prepare themselves for that which is high.

Jesse, David's father, will tell you the

Class-Room where the intrepid boy is learning life's greatest lessons. He points away to the lonely hills, where silence holds her sway—'he keepeth the sheep.' There! minding a few sheep, is it there that wisdom is to be found?—is it there that a boy can be made ready to sway a sceptre and wear a crown? Yes! Great things, the very greatest, are to be learned there. Let not the town-born think that all the wisdom dwells in cities, that her ways are streets. There are voices in the solitary hills, and forming hands in quietness, and the silent heavens, and large atmospheres, and earth's green spaces, and the splendid sun and the silent moon and stars, have all great words to speak. All the great things that David learned in those vast silences no man can tell. But we may think of two gifts that came to him, and they were gifts of surpassing beauty and power.

It was in these silences that he found that wisdom which comes to the mind that broods and the heart that feels. You can

get cleverness in a crowd, it will teach you to be sharp and smart. Your wits will be sharpened, you will be quick and alert. But wisdom only comes in solitude. How wise the thoughtful country people get! They do not know men's fine theories, but they often have God's deep knowledge. Two great books of God ever lie open before them: and from their ample pages they learn the deepest things. They read the great book of Nature: silent heavens are their teachers, the wind is God's messenger, and the whole round world speaks His name. And that other book, so full of wisdom—the mind of man. No man can be long with himself without learning some of the deepest things. Who doubts that this was part of that splendid teaching which has made David a king for all time? His mind was nourished in wisdom, it was made strong and sure in truth. His character was built up in that practical power which made him a leader then, and a great guide for all time.

He was a shepherd, and it is the business of a shepherd to guard the sheep. But he, who in those days would protect sheep, must be full of courage, for he must stand between the lion and the sheep. His must be no coward's soul. The good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. And so, when he heard the roar of the lion, he may have trembled, and he may have been fearful, but he went forth to meet the lion, and in the strength of God he slew him. And when he saw the prowling bear come stealthily to the flock, and carry away a tiny lamb, he arose in pursuit, and delivered the lamb out of his mouth, and slew the bear. So in his daily, ordinary life, God was building up in his soul a daring courage, so that when he came to be king he would have the qualities that he needed. For he who would be a true king must be couragous and daring and bold.

That is one of the great words of this story to us to-day. Just where we are God is preparing us for all that He has for us

to do. Our present is preparing the way of our future. We may not know it: we may not have thought about it. We may not see His hand or hear His voice. He guides His people when they do not see. But if we do faithfully and well the things which He puts into our hands, they shall be God's preparation for life's greatest work. They may be little and very simple, but they are the real part of our training, in these our education is being perfected. From sheep-minding to kingship seems a long way: but it is the way that God leads many of His children. If they do not find it, it is because they did not learn the meaning of sheep-minding. To fill a little space with faithfulness and simplicity and sacrifice is always God's way of leading those whom He loves to a larger service and a deeper joy. Let us mind the little things for it is always to them that the great things are bound.

A Little Man with Great Difficulties

He sought to see Jesus . . . .; and could not for the crowd, because he was little of stature.—LUKE xix. 3.

ISN'T Zaccheus a fascinating man? Sometimes I think he is the most interesting man in all the Bible. There may be some things in him which we do not like, but we cannot disregard his charm. He is so alive, so alert, that we cannot keep him a long way off. We must draw near to him, and look and think and feel. To speak only of his good qualities. He was ambitious, and his ambition was so noble. He had such great difficulties, but he was so persistent in mastering them. He had such a great surprise, and yet he so quickly and so beautifully responded to it. Jesus made such a deep appeal to his heart, and yet he so completely answered to it. All these things lie right upon the surface of this beautiful story, and we cannot help but

be interested in him. He draws our eyes and he holds our hearts. And very happy will it be for us, if we can imitate him and follow in his steps. To-day I want us to think of one thing only in relation to him. And may nothing turn us away from that thought, and from learning its great lesson.

I

I have said that Zaccheus had a great ambition. 'He sought to see Jesus.' However you interpret that—and it can have a very shallow interpretation, and a very deep one—it was a really fine ambition. But every great ambition is beset with a difficulty. Not easily do men attain their finest ideals. These dwell at the top of craggy heights, and the way that leads to them is steep and perilous and hard. Not without hardness do men vanquish their foes. For often they are clad with strong armour and are entrenched in strong places, and it is sometimes a hand-to-hand conflict in which a man fights for his very

life. Not without sacrifice and endurance do men run the race and come to the goal. For often the way is long and weary, and sometimes very lonely, and the heart misgives and doubts and fears. Every high thing that is worthy of either being, or having, or doing has its corresponding difficulty. It is always there. Great things are never easy. The way that leads to them is never smooth. And of this thing Zaccheus is a striking illustration. The first thing that you see, after the shining light of his great ambition, is the black, threatening form of his great difficulty. 'He wanted,' and he 'could not.' And that was just what St. Paul meant when he said, 'A great door and effectual is opened to me, and there are many adversaries.' Notice, he does not say, '*but* there are many adversaries,' as though it were exceptional; but '*and* there are many adversaries,' as though it were natural, the very thing to be expected.

Now that is the first thing for every one of us to learn. I hear a boy say of another,

'Yes he *can* do it, for he is clever.' I hear a girl say of another, 'It is easy for her!' There is just a grain of truth in these sentences, just enough to save them from being nonsense. But there is a pound of untruth in them. For what they mean who use them is, that to some people there are no difficulties and that to others there are many, and they are of those to whom there are many. Whereas the real truth is that difficulty is in the life of us all. Our difficulties are not all in the same place, and everybody does not make quite the same fuss about them. But they are surely there. And you will never attempt to do anything which is worth the doing but something will stand in your way to hinder you. Of course, if you are content to do little things, to walk in the undistinguished way, your difficulties will not be many and the way will not be hard. Snails do not find Alps in their path. But if you want to excel, to be really noble; if you cherish at your very heart a great ambition, then you will

find your way strewn with difficulties, and the path will be hard. It is he who would attain to the lofty height that has the long climb that tears the hands and feet, and sometimes outwearies the heart.

II

But this simple story not only reveals a fact: it also throws great light upon that fact. One of the best things that could happen to us would be for us to understand our difficulties; what they are, where we are to look for them, the spirit in which they are to be approached, and what they will do with us if we do nothing with them. And while this story does not settle all these things, it does help us with one. It tells us where Zaccheus found his difficulties : and perhaps in looking for his, we may find our own. 'He sought to see Jesus, and could not for the crowd, because he was little of stature.' Then his difficulties were in two places—in himself, and in his circumstances. Now let us think about that,

because that does more than help us to understand Zaccheus, it helps us to understand ourselves. All our difficulties are in the same two places as they were in the life of this man, and it is there we shall have to meet them, and wrestle with them, if we are to prevail.

(1) He found his difficulty first, in *himself*. There was a great crowd that day to see Jesus, and this man was 'little of stature,' and when he came the thing seemed hopeless. If he had been big, he could have seen over the heads of others. If he had been a boy, he would have crept between their legs and have got to the front. But he was a man, and little! He could not help that. He did not make himself. And Jesus has said that with all our anxiety we cannot add a single cubit to our stature! All of which is true. But that does not alter the fact that the littleness of his stature was a great part of his difficulty. And what was true of him is true of us all. A great part of our difficulty is in ourselves.

Demosthenes wanted to be an orator, but he stammered ; a boy dreams of being a painter, but he thinks he has no eye for colours. And that may be a difficulty, but it is not a hindrance. It stands in our way, but it is not to prevent. And if we study ourselves we shall find that many of our difficulties have their roots within. We are proud, and therefore we cannot be taught. We will not work hard, we want everything to be easy, and our laziness prevents us. We are easily led, and we let a thousand things attract and draw us from the one thing that we have to do. We are like water, unstable ; and we can be very easily diverted ; like little children we loose one glittering thing to grasp a thing that glitters a little more. Our difficulties are very near home. When we look for them we do not want a telescope, but a microscope.

(2) Then he found his difficulty *in his circumstances*. His littleness was not always his difficulty. Sometimes it was his advan-

tage. He could walk with ease where Goliath would have found it hard. But to-day it was this crowd that made it so difficult. There the people stood on both sides of the way : what was a little man to do ? The circumstances were dead against him. And he could not help that. How should he know there would be a crowd ? He didn't make the crowd ! No, that is quite true. But it was his difficulty. And that is precisely where many of us—why many ?—*all* of us find our difficulty. In Florence there is a noble piece of statuary, it is one of the masterpieces of the world. But it was hewn out of a very intractable piece of marble. One sculptor, everybody thought, had spoiled the marble, and had given it up as an impossible piece. But Michael Angelo wrought it with his genius, and though he found it hard, he achieved. And the material of our life is often very hard. Circumstances are often against us. Is there anybody who was born precisely where he would have chosen to be born?

Is there nothing in life we would like to alter, to add to this condition, and subtract that circumstance ? Yes, life is hard. The thing we want to do is not easy. The material does not bend to our hand, and quite quickly take the shape we want it to take. We, too, are hindered by the crowd.

III

He wanted to see Jesus. And there were difficulties. Is he not therefore to see Him ? Is his hope to be defeated, the desire of his heart to be quenched in despair ? That will depend on the man. The thing will test him, but it will show the stuff of which he is made. A man's attitude to difficulties reveals the mould in which he is cast. If he turns from them in hopelessness he is a little man. If he confronts them to overcome them his build is greater. If he tries and tries until he has stripped them of their strength and trampled them under his feet, he is a great man. Zaccheus sought to see Jesus, but that would not have done

it. It is the other thought that is suggested, and, indeed, said by St. Luke—he sought with continuous effort, that was the thing that wrought his victory. It is only continuous activity that wears down the strength of difficulty. It is only enduring effort that crumbles the very mountains into dust. Demosthenes stammered. But he was bent upon being an orator. And so he had a small chamber built under the ground to prepare himself for the great thing upon which he had set his heart. And because he feared the tenacity of his own mind, and thought he might be lured from his loneliness, he shaved one side of his head, that the confusion of appearing in public might bind him to his retreat.

Dr. Boyd tells us that Mr. Rawson, the master of the school to which Mr. Gladstone went, said that Arthur Stanley (the future Dean of Westminster) was the most stupid boy at figures that ever came under his care, save only one, who was yet more hopeless, and was unable to grasp simple

addition and multiplication. That stupid boy became the great Chancellor of the Exchequer, a perfect magician with figures, who set them to the wizardry of music, and enthralled the House of Commons by his complete mastery of them,—William E. Gladstone. Why? How? 'He sought, with continuous effort'! The spirit of Zaccheus was his spirit. By that humdrum way he conquered. By that unromantic way he came to the goal. He kept saying to himself 'twice two are four' until they never could be anything else. And it is only so that we shall achieve. It is the repeated stroke that drives the nail home. It is the persistent runner that gets to the goal. It is the man who does not know the meaning of defeat, who will not acknowledge it, that wins the prize. Zaccheus intended to see Jesus, and he did. And only as we set mind, and heart, and soul, and strength to our purpose, shall we crush our difficulties under our feet, and do the thing upon which we have set our heart.

Building a Character.

I LOVE the pleasures of imagination. So indeed, I think do we all. I love to sit, when I am awake, and dream,—dream of far-off things, of things that I never shall enjoy and never possess. What enchanted lands these are, how lovely are the paths, how ravishing the music! You may tell me that this is unprofitable, that every hour thus spent is a wasted hour, that while the world is crying for help it is wicked to waste time in this way. The world wants workers, not dreamers: men who bear and toil and serve, not they who find delight in delicious dreams! so runs the familiar word. It may all be true, but it is no disparagement of the delights of imagination. They are delicious and rapturous, and they serve great purposes both of rest and of inspiration. So to-day, let us begin with a sure imagining.

Suppose a man were to meet you to-morrow, and tell you that you had to build a house. Only one. But you had to build one, and then to live in it for ever. At first you would be startled, and would very likely say that you could not do it. Then, when you were quite certain that what the man said was real, you would be thoughtful and quiet, and wonder when you should begin and how and where, and what sort of a house you should try to build. You would have to think of all the needs of life, of the needs of the body, and of the mind, and of the heart, and of the soul. And not of the needs of the present only, but of the vast needs of the future, so that no least need should be unprovided for. And then you would have to think of how to begin, and to choose the style and the size of the house, and of what material it should be built. And your mind would be full of deep thoughts and of thoughts that were far-off, if you wanted to do your work in a noble way, and to

build a house that was ample for your needs.

Now that imagination is not really an imagination, for Jesus, who is our greatest Teacher as well as our Saviour, meets us to-day, and He says that that is precisely what every one of us has to do. That is the real business of life. We do a great many other things, but that is the greatest and the supremest of them all. Every man has to build a house, and that house is his own character. He has to build it once, for no man has but one life to live. He has to live in it for ever, for every man's first and last companion is himself. Jesus understood life, and that is a great thing, for life is full of mysteries,—dark places that have no candle to light them. It deceives people. So many things seem to be this and that, or to do this and that: but they have no power. But Jesus knew. He was the one true Man who 'saw life steadily and saw it whole.' And He said that all men were builders. There was not

a single exception. Whatever else men did or did not, they did that. And some were wise and some were foolish. Some thought and some did not. And that it was a sign of wisdom, not to build a big house on sand that would shift: but to dig and go deep, and lay a foundation on a rock. That, surely, is the thing that gives seriousness to life, to make these few years very important, that invests every act with deep meaning. It will be well, then, for us to sit down and consider. There is life before us. It must be made into something. How can we make it into a thing of which we shall not be ashamed? We will think.

I

And first: a wise builder gets a plan. He does not begin to build anyhow. He thinks of many things—of the land on which he has to build, of his own needs and abilities, of the material with which he can build, and of the conditions under which he has to build. And when the day

draws near in which he proposes to begin, he gets a plan. I was greatly perplexed, as a little boy, by seeing a picture of a church which they were going to build. There it stood in the familiar surroundings before a single stone of it was laid. Then, for the first time, I learned that every house is built out of a man's head. It is there long before it stands upon the ground. He sees it, he plans it, and then he sets to work to build it. Long before St. Paul's Cathedral stood at the top of Ludgate Hill, it stood in the mind of Sir Christopher Wren. He held it in his mind, took it to bed with him at night, dreamed about it, wakened with it in the morning, thought about it all day, and out of his head and heart, according to his own plan, he built the great House of God.

Now that is just how it must be with your house. You must build—that you cannot help. God decided that before you were born. But you can decide, and must decide, the kind of building that you will build.

Robert Browning somewhere gives us these two bits of advice: 'Image the whole, then execute the parts.' 'Fancy the fabric quite, ere you build.' Think! Consider! Plan! Purpose! Do not let life, like unregulated waters, run just where it will. Be an architect as well as a mason. And do not start out on the vastest and most far-reaching enterprise that man ever undertakes without any idea of where you want to go and what you want to do.

It is just here that so many people make their worst mistakes. They are fond of show, they like 'to cut a dash,' appearances rule all their thoughts, and their house is flimsy, unsubstantial, and unreal. But others remember that a house has to be lived in as well as looked at, that there are days when the proud spirit of the storm stalks through the land, as well as days of radiant sunlight and exquisite calm, and so their first and last concern is that their house shall be good. 'I will be rich!'—says one. It is a great ambition,

for riches are good, and he who has them has a great instrument in his hand, a vast opportunity is before him, and great possibilities are his. But it is not life's highest purpose, and the way that leads to it is crowded with perils, and many have fallen by the way, and some have failed in the hour of their achievement. Jesus said it was very hard for a rich man to be good: and all experience does but confirm the great wisdom of his words. And another says, 'I will be great!' It is a great choice. To despise the little things and to set one's face to the stars, is itself an achievement. But greatness is hard to achieve, and the real thing is only to be found in lowly service and sacrificial endeavour. And, 'I will be happy!' says a third. And so you ought to be, for that surely is our Maker's intention. The great Father would surely have a family of happy children. But happiness is never found in the hot pursuit of the painted butterfly which men call pleasure, but only in those

great qualities of the soul which are the roots of the divinest joy. Mind what you choose. Take care of your ambitions. For here it is so easy to go astray. And never forget that wealth and goodness and happiness in their deepest meaning are only possible in the way of Christ, in the simple doing of His holy will.

So you want a plan—a plan of that glittering but mysterious thing that men call life. Then go to one of the men, of whom there are myriads, who have built the house beautiful in character. I am a great lover of Elijah—he is so human, so tender, and withal so splendid. Nothing can daunt his courage, nothing turn him from his great purpose. All Baal's mighty priests are craven and cowed before him. And yet he is so simple, so humble, so devout. After he has dominated the whole people on Carmel and shaken them from their indecision and apathy, he girds up his loins, and runs, as a servant, before the chariot of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

And if I should ask him for the secret of his life, he says it is so simple—he takes all his inspiration from the very Face of God. He never forgets His all-seeingness. 'The Lord God of Israel before whom I stand'—that is his watchword, his light and all his strength.

Or turn to that rare saint who stands out in such glory in the later part of the New Testament—St. John: the reader of the deep secret of God's tender heart, the revealer in his own life of the gracious spirit of our Lord. He was not ever thus. He had his days of heat and hate, of narrowness and bigotry, when false fires burned on the altar of his life. But now he is so different, so full of pity and compassion, of large forgiveness and beautiful charity. Grace sits upon his lips, and in his heart love has built her perpetual nest. And if I should ask him how he built so beautiful a life, he would answer like this—it is all of love, 'I loved the beautiful, the good, the true: and I tried always to

love them, and, day by day, they caught me up, and carried me on, and, at the last, lifted me into their grace and power.' It was by the depth of his fellowship with the spirit of Jesus that he was changed into His likeness.

And I dare to turn to the greatest Life of all; the one Life that was perfect in beauty and goodness, that had no touch of defect and had no shadow of a sin-stain, the Life that has won the love of men as no other life has, and has bound men in a loyalty that they would feel it high treason to break; and I say reverently, 'Master and Lord, what is Thy secret?' And He answers with His whole Life, 'I came not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.' 'I do always the things that are pleasing to Him.' God, His Father, was everything, beginning and end, first and last, all in all. That is the first thing to-day. Try to learn the secret of greatness, plan your life in the light of God. Creep into the presence of Jesus,

and ask Him to show you the pattern according to which your life is to be lived. And hour by hour He will disclose to you what are the things that He would have you to do. His will is not only the way but the goal of that high perfectness of character which is at once man's finest glory and his deepest joy.

II

And second: a wise builder digs to a sure foundation. A tent can be set up upon the sand, its day is brief and bright. But a building which is to be big and sure, and has to weather all sorts of storms as well as the sunlight, that must be built on a rock. So a wise builder digs a deep hole, and goes down until he finds or makes a firm foundation, and there he fastens his building, fastens it to that which nothing can shake. That is his only security: apart from that he may lose all that he has built and be homeless in the storm.

So, a great part, and that not the least

important part, of a great building is not seen. There the structure stands, rich and beautiful in the splendour of its architecture, but the things on which it rests are hidden. The foundations are unseen. That is just what the great Teacher says about the wise builder. He 'digged, and went deep, and laid a foundation on a rock.' There, where the eyes do not see, the broad, sure bases are laid, upon which a noble character can rest in security and power. Seeming is not enough, there must be reality beneath it. Appearances will not do, it must be established on that which cannot be moved. You will often be tempted to build otherwise—it is easier, quicker, less costly. Why not build on seeming, appearance, pretence? The house can be very beautiful and it will soon be built.' 'No, no,' says Jesus, 'your house has to be tested. The strong winds will beat about it, the rains and the floods will come, it will be tried by fire. Dig deep and go to the rock, build upon reality and

in full recognition of the great laws that rule the earth, and remembering the tests that will be applied. Build upon a rock!'

That is a profound counsel, and one to which we are not always ready to give heed. It takes so long. Some of our finest work is hidden away. We like work that takes the eye and has the price. We are greedy for quick returns of profit. We do not want to work for days and weeks, for weeks and years, upon that which no one will see. But that is the root of safety, that is it which guards and guarantees all our other work, that is it which at last will vindicate all our other work. Showy, superficial, glittering work may catch many eyes to-day: but it is the work that is real, and only that, that will abide the test of time. And after all it is that which matters. The voice of eternity silences the voices of to-day, however noisy they may be. And the glory of the real exposes in a golden glory the pomp of the perishable, however arrestive it may be to-day.

What is this rock, then, upon which character is to be built? Certainly it is to be nothing less than the eternal, the deep truth of things as they stand in the thought and heart of God. You may build your house upon a lie. And for a quite brief day it may glitter in the sunlight, and all men may behold it, and all speak its praise. But it will always be unsafe: and one day it will tremble and topple and fall. Gehazi did that, and for a brief hour it prospered, but presently white leprosy leaped upon him, and he lost all that he had. Ananias did it too, and for a brief while, he had a bubble reputation, and then it burst, and he and his lie perished together. Or you can build your house upon pretence—half-brother of a lie—and empty people who have put their eyes out may be dazzled with its glory. But in the day of test the veneer will be chipped off, the hollowness of it all will be revealed, and its futility will stand naked and ashamed. Time itself is a severe test,

and there are quite other things, and all things that rest on rottenness have their doom already recorded in heaven, and only wait on sufferance for the execution of the verdict.

Build your house on sincerity, truthfulness, reality: and in the midst of the wildest storm you shall dwell in complete security and peace. The furious winds may hurl themselves at it, the tormented waters may dash themselves all about it. But you need not fear. When the proud storm has done its worst, and the winds are rolled up again into silence, and the furious waters are at peace, the building shall stand forth, majestic, strong, sure. It was so with Joseph, with the Hebrew children, with Daniel: and supremely and soul-compellingly with Jesus Christ. This is the highest thing. Love the truth, seek it, desire it beyond the desire for rubies, speak it, act it, be it—yes! supremely, be it! Nourish not nor cherish any lie in the soul. And building your whole life on that, in inten-

tion and purpose and reality, your character shall stand forth, full of beauty, and glory, and power. Nothing can touch it, nothing can do it harm. It cannot be hurt. For when Time has tested all things it shall leave truth with a finer glory, a higher power.

III

And the third great fact is this: a wise builder minds what he builds. And this is quite as necessary as the other two. He may have had a beautiful plan, and he may have digged deep and laid a strong and solid foundation; but if then he did not mind what he put into his building, neither fine plan nor sure foundation could save it from overthrow. If the bricks were poor, and the mortar untempered, and the wood rotten, and the parts imperfectly fitted, and the roof insecure, the house might be all right for a summer's day, but its overthrow would be perfectly certain, and when it did come it would be complete. Every house is subject to test, it cannot escape

trial. The great elements will test every man's building. It cannot for ever escape heat and wind and water and fire. These are sure to try it. And if it cannot withstand them, it fails of the purpose for which it was made. It may be pretty, indeed beautiful, but it is no good for the thing for which it was intended, and it will stand forth discredited and destroyed.

And so it is precisely of the house of life. Life has one great and supreme end. It may have secondary purposes and lesser ends. But stamped right upon it, and upon every one of its parts, is God's divine intention. He has determined its plan, its object, its great end. And to fail of that is to fail altogether. A man may be good for many things. He may be a good carpenter, a good merchant, a good lawyer. He may be very agreeable and pleasant, a good companion, a man whose company many will seek. He may get wealth, and learning, and culture and refinement. But if he fails of the glory

of God—life's highest and only sufficient end—he has failed in life's main intention. A thousand secondary successes will not compensate for life's supreme failure, while to have reached life's final goal—the attainment of a rich and noble character—will make life's smaller failures little and unimportant.

If we would be good builders we must give heed to what we build and as to how we build it. St. Paul is our great teacher here. He shows us the one sufficient foundation—the only One which will hold securely all that we build upon it—Jesus Christ. He says that some build on it hay, wood, stubble—that which costs them nothing. Others, he says, build on it gold, silver, precious stones—that which is costly, that demands a high spirit of sacrifice and dedication. And one day the fire comes, the fire that comes to try, and one loses all that he had built, and the other finds that his work is preserved unto eternal life.

What, then, are the things that we can build on the foundation? What are the things that will bear the test? To which can be answered with the completest confidence—all things that spring from love. Love is the thing that endures, that out-lasts everything else, that leaps beyond the present into the immortal future. And all the things that have this for their spring and root share in her eternal life. And that is why to-day we speak of the alabaster box of ointment, and the widow's two little mites, and the cup of cold water, and the lad's basket with the five little loaves and the two small fishes, and the visiting of them that are in prison, and the little service done to one of the little ones. They have escaped out of the first century and have travelled through every one, and have come to us, because they are full of the spirit of love. You cannot kill them. They are altogether indestructible. They are the sure things, the things that abide, because love is at their very

heart, and is woven through every part of their texture.

Love! That is the supreme thing. That is the thing that out-runs the centuries: that bids a proud defiance to time: decay cannot touch it: over it change has no power. Get many things, but with all thy getting get that. Speak its words, think its thoughts, do its holy deeds, sacrifice its sacrifices. And lo! your house—the House Beautiful of character—shall outlast the wildest storm. Over it the fiercest wind and the wildest torrents shall have no power. And when the storm is spent and the black night is gone, and once more the radiant sunlight is in the land, it shall be seen that your house stands there glittering in the light, embellished with those gems that were so high a part of the life of our Lord.

Now I close. But do not forget. You are builders. You cannot help that. It is one of the great necessities of life. You built yesterday, you are building to-day,

you will build to-morrow. What you will build is in your thought and heart and hand. It may be a House for God: it may be a house for the devil. It is your greatest task, and it is just the one which you cannot escape. Go to Jesus and ask Him to teach you. Ask Him to take you, as He did Moses, up into the mount and show you the pattern: to give you wisdom to accept it at His hands, to give you patience to dig deep and found your house upon a rock, and that you may have strength to build your house of all that which is costly and which abides. And if you ask in deep sincerity He will assuredly give to you the guidance and help that you need.

Red, White, and Blue; or, What the Flowers Say

My text is in my hand. It is not like an ordinary text, for that is in words and is taken from a book. But perhaps this is a word and is taken from a book, for there is more than one kind of words, and God has many books. This vast world is a book —a book of God's. And for leaves it has wide and beautiful fields, and mountains that reach up into the sky, and seas that toss in tumult, and heavens that are full of glittering stars. And the verses in this book are the sweet songs of birds, and trees that are clothed with beauty, and streams that run in and out among the hills trying to find their way into the sea, and flowers that by their sweet loveliness draw all eyes to their beholding. And as you see, my text is taken from that beautiful

and holy book. It is this tiny bunch of flowers. Just look at them for a minute. They were gathered for me by my little girl. There are a couple of white sweet-peas, and three blue cornflowers, and the sweetest of all red roses. Red and White and Blue.

Many years ago Job said, 'Speak to the earth and it shall teach thee.' He meant that this big world had great things to say, and that if we spoke to it and listened intently, it would speak to us. It would tell us of God's infinite wisdom, show us something of His great mind. And Jesus said that we were to 'behold the fowls of the air' and 'consider the lilies of the field,' because they would show us how thoughtful God was, and how careful, and how He watched over all His children. Let us speak to-day to these flowers, and then listen, not only with our ears but with our hearts, and they will teach us. They have many things to say, some about God, some about themselves, and some about us. We cannot

hear them all to-day, but to some of them we may hearken and find guidance and help.

I

The first thing these flowers say is this, 'We are very beautiful.' They do not cry that out at the top of their voices, as though they were proud and vain, for all the flowers are very modest. But they keep on saying it all through the day, by the very beauty which God has given to them. They are not very big, and they might very easily be overlooked. One by one they are not so sweet as that they would arrest attention. But every one has that mysterious thing that we call beauty. No one can say precisely what it is, but we all know that it is there.

Just look at them. How delicately they are wrought, how gradually the colours fade into one another, how exquisite they are in their form, what wonder they inspire, what love they provoke! And because of this grace a little girl likes to wear a little

bunch on her bosom or at her waist, and a brave, pure boy will carry a scarlet rose or a white lily in his button-hole. It is their beauty that attracts us, and makes us care for them and handle them gently, and lay hold of them as sacred things which we took out of the very hand of God.

And if God has made a flower beautiful, He surely intends that beauty should be one of the chiefest things in the life of a child. And when I speak of beauty now, I am not thinking of beauty of face, but of that deeper beauty of mind and heart and soul. Beauty of face you say you cannot help. But you can help it far more than you think. For after all the rarest beauty of face comes through beauty of soul. It is a noble mind and a fine soul shining through the face that gives to it its finest grace. And that beauty will change what would otherwise be a very plain face into a loveliness which is like that of the angels.

All evil things are ugly things. You may not believe it, but it is so. Sin is not only ugly in itself, but it makes everything ugly that it touches. It puts a scowl on the face of the bad-tempered. It puckers the brow of the irritable. It seats envy in the eyes of the selfish. It torments with restlessness the features of the discontented. It makes empty the face of the vain and the proud. And to those who do not resist it, it writes out its own ugliness in every part of their life, and leaves them with scars and stains and blemishes. Nothing makes a face so ugly as sin. Nothing so strips a life of the last bit of beauty as evil.

And there is nothing that fills life with such beauty and grace as goodness. Once set the heart to the love of God, let Him rule in every part of it, and quite naturally beauty will spring into the life, just as a fair flower springs from its root. We were all made for beauty, and love is the only way by which it comes. As we live

and obey and serve, our lives will grow into the form of that perfect beauty which God unveiled to us in the life of His Son. God wants His children to be beautiful, beautiful in their thoughts and in their loves, beautiful in their words and in their acts, beautiful indeed in every part of their lives. And we shall only be God's good children as we grow into the beauty of Jesus Christ our Lord. That is the first thing for every one of us to remember ; life has been given to us for beauty, we must make every bit of it fine in the sight of God.

II

Now listen again, for the flowers have another thing to say. They say, and they say it quite modestly, ' We are all beautiful, but the beauty of every one of us is different.' Just look at them. The sweet-peas, like butterflies resting upon green stalks, are not a bit like the rose, and the fiery glow of the rose is quite different from

the delicate blue of the corn-flowers. They are different in shape, in size, in texture, in colour, in beauty—by no means could one be mistaken for the other. Nowhere is there such infinite beauty in such infinite diversity as there is in the world of flowers. There is the crimson pomp of the peony, the delicate beauty of the violet, the glory of the sun-flower turning its shining face to the sun, and the little white lily living in a hidden place and filling the atmosphere with its perpetual sweetness. There they are. We can peep at them over the fences as we come to church, a goodly company of fair sweet things. But their Maker has woven for each a different robe, breathed into each a different sweetness; yet He has set each in His own heart, and given each to us for joy and even delight.

And I think God intends that to be true of boys and girls. People often try to make us all alike, but that is not God's way. He would have us all to be beautiful, there must be no doubt about that; but each

must be beautiful in his own way. God knows nothing of monotony. Nowhere are there two faces alike. And I am sure that go where you will you will never find two souls alike. Some girls are like peonies, they blaze and glow; and some are like violets, veiled and hidden, but full of an exquisite sweetness. Some boys are like sun-flowers—they are dominant, arrestive, challenging: and some are like delicate lilies, hidden, but holding at the very heart of their modesty a white purity and an exquisite grace. St. Peter is on nearly every page of the gospel—he could not help it, it was his very life. St. Andrew is on hardly more than one, it was his nature to stand in the shade. A man is not a bigger man, nor a better, because he stands in the light. Jesus loved Andrew as well as Peter—each had his own place, his own work, aye, and his own glory.

And that means a great deal for you and me. We get discontented with ourselves, wishing that we were other than

we are. If we had showy gifts, if we could stand in the broad bright light, if we could do striking things, if our name was in everybody's mouth—then life would be a great thing. But we are so little, so hidden, we have so little glory. But violets have a beauty which does not belong to the sun-flower, and lilies can carry sweet messages where peonies cannot go. It is enough for us to be what God has made us, and that we do the thing that He has given us. It is no good for a candle to quarrel with the sun, it is better for it to think of its own shining. Even the sun cannot light a man in the darkness of the night. The candle may not light a world, but it can guide the weary feet of a tired man as he threads his way across the tangled moor, and give just as much light as a dying man can bear as he waits for the coming of his friend, the sweet Angel of Death. Mary and Martha were worlds apart, but the Scripture says that Jesus loved them both. And it should be enough

for us to know that we stand in God's heart, that He has made us what we are, and set us in our appointed place. There—violet or sun-flower, lily or rose—we must be all that He intended us to be.

III

But let us listen again. These flowers have a third thing to say to us. They are friends, with no hates, no enmities, no uncharities. So they say together, 'We are very beautiful, and we are all different, but we all grew together in the same square yard of ground. When you could see nothing of us we were all close together, and so we have grown to sweetness and grace side by side. We grew in the same little patch of ground, the rain that fell on one fell also on the other, the same wind blew upon us all, and the same sun in the far-off sky wooed us and called us and drew us, and we all answered to his call. We felt his warmth and we peeped out to find the light, and he has painted

us with our loveliness—one red, one white, one blue.'

And that is one of the great parables of life. Up from the same old dirty earth, and down from the same bright, shining sun, one flower draws this sweetness and another that, so that the smell of the violet could never be mistaken for that of the rose. It is the standing miracle of the garden, the forgotten, hidden witness of the flowers.

And this, as I have said, is a little parable of life. It is true that boys and girls in the grace of their life are all different, but they all find the root of their goodness in one place, in one place alone. Only as life is rooted in God does it grow into exquisite beauty and clothe itself with charm. It needs infinite things to call this beauty out of its hiding-place, and to bring it to grace and sweetness. That is true of the commonest of the flowers, it is true of the greatest of men. I take a tiny daisy, and I say to it, 'Do not be so vain! What

is this conceit of yours that you want a sun? The sun is ninety-five million miles away, and it is big, and really you are only a daisy, you cannot need that! I will set a fire beside you, and belt you round with candles, that surely shall be enough.' But the daisy, not slowly, answers, 'No sun—no daisy.' And she keeps her word. And I say to a boy, 'What is this vain conceit of yours that you need a God? He is so great, and so far away, the vast heavens are too small for Him and His glory none can tell. I will gird you with other influences, and bring other powers to bear, and you shall grow into beauty in other ways. Be content! and let the things of the earth be your stay.' And the deepest things in a boy's life make answer, 'No God—no boy.' He, too, has a genius for keeping his word.

It is only as you live with the infinite things, only as you lay hold on God by faith and hope and love, that you can expect to come to that beauty for which

God has made you. It is in the attachment of our heart to Him by love and loyalty that we draw from Him those influences that refine and exalt our life. We depend upon Him for every bit of grace that we have, and reading the same great Book, and joining in the same worship, and going together to the same holy sacrament, we each grow in our own way into His likeness, from glory to glory.

Many years ago, the great poet Tennyson was walking in a beautiful garden. He stooped and plucked a beautiful flower, and looking to his friend he said, 'What the sun is to that flower, Jesus Christ is to my soul. He is the Sun of my soul.' And John Keble taught us when night was drawing her dark curtains about the earth, to sing, 'Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear, it is not night if Thou be near.' Both these were great men and good men. And you are only boys and girls. But what was true of them is true also of you. If

life is to be full of beauty and fragrant with sweetness, it will only be because Jesus is its Sun, the one by whose gracious light and heat you respond to the great appeals and reach to the highest and best. And these are the things that this tiny bunch of flowers has whispered to me to-day. I will try to hearken to them, and do you! Thus this little life of mine shall daily grow in a strange grace, and everywhere carry the sweetness of exquisite flowers.

'Buxton to Hartington, Sept. 2, 1914'

I HAVE brought my text this morning in my pocket. It is only a very little thing, but it has big words to speak. It has been in my pocket for more than a week, and whenever I have been very still, I have heard it speaking, and it has been saying all sorts of wise things to me, if I would only listen to them. I shall never forget how I came by it, and I am sure I shall be both wiser and better if I can always hear and be obedient to what it has to say. There the text is. Can you see it? I expect not. It looks to you, sitting there in the pew, like a tiny bit of cardboard, very dirty, and quite without value. That is just what it is. It had value—I gave eleven pence for it—and I could have done something with it. But the day for that has gone. And to-

day it only has a value by the things which it has to suggest. But they touch life at every point, and they are close-fitting, and they go deep and are very powerful. 'What?' you say, 'that little bit of card have teaching for life—how can that be?' Come now, let us think, and I will tell you how it came to me, and what it is, and what it has kept on saying to me ever since I have had it. It is the return half of a Railway Ticket, and with it I could have travelled on the London and North Western Railway from Buxton to Hartington, on September 2 or September 3, 1914. Then its power was exhausted, either by use or by neglect. It did not at all matter which. When September 4 came its power was gone. How I came by it, and what it has to say I will try to tell you. Keep both your ears open, for it really is a wise teacher, and has great things to say. And when we have heard them we must try not to forget. Three simple things I want it to say to us to-day.

I

And first. This little ticket represents to me a real opportunity. What could I have done with it? I could have gone from Buxton to Hartington, by any train on that line, within a definite time—and that is a distance of eleven miles. For a time, but only for a time, it was a wide open door of opportunity. It gave me a chance. It was not a real thing, but it was a possibility.

Now life is like that. Some of you, I dare say, never sit down with your life and ask it questions. Your mind and hands are so full of other things that you have not time for this. But some of you do. And you say to yourselves, 'What is life?' 'What is its meaning?' 'How am I to understand it?' Well now, suppose you take this as part of the answer. It is not the whole of it, but it is certainly a very great part of it. Life is opportunity, my chance of being and doing something; a great possibility which is put into my hand, but

which I must use, and turn it into a real thing. That is true of life as a whole, and that is true of every smallest part of it. In its bigness, stretching away from the moment when I was born to the very moment when I shall die, it is my big chance. In every one of its little parts, a day, an hour, this very simple act, it is the possibility which God is always giving me of getting a bit wiser, of growing a bit better, of doing something which He wants me to do, and of doing it in His noble and holy way. That is a deep part of life's meaning—that is how I am to interpret it. It is God standing there, near to me, and opening a door, and bidding me enter and use every new chance to the full and for the best.

But what are these opportunities for? Well, really, they are for two things, and only for two. They are opportunities for being something or of doing something, and really the first of these is far more important than the second. Life is our great

chance of being something. And every hour our little chance of taking a little step toward that which we want to be. The real business of life is not to see how many things we can get. 'To have' is not to be our highest ambition. Nor are we sent here to fly like butterflies in hot pursuit of beautiful but fading flowers. Pleasure is not the real end of life. But we are sent here to be something. And that is a very beautiful thought, because you can be very big and very beautiful, even though you only live in a little place. And what we are to be Jesus travelled all the way from heaven to teach us. He, in Himself, showed us, not only what God is like—though He did show us that. But He showed us what man is like when he is what God wants him to be. Jesus is God's pattern of a man. He was gentle and kind, and always ready to forgive, and He loved God with all His heart, and did everything that God wanted Him to do, and His life was very beautiful and very good. And life is your opportunity,

and mine, to be like that. And if that should be so, then life's other opportunity would soon be realized, for we should be sure to do beautiful things and to do them all day long. A boy cannot be good without doing good. These two things always go together. They cannot be separated. They are like a boy and his shadow, the back and the front of a thing, the love of the heart and a person who is loved. That's the first thing then: Life is opportunity—opportunity for being and for doing, and I must try to enter into its wide open door.

II

And the second thing my little ticket teaches me is this: that my opportunities are only for a time. If I look at the ticket it has printed on it these menacing words, 'Available on the day of issue or following day.' Then its power ends. When the last train has gone on the second day the chance is withdrawn. Then the door is shut. It

is no good that I shall say, 'I did not notice that,' or 'It ought not to be.' It is!—and I have to abide by that. In railway travelling the railway company makes the rules, and if I want to use their line, I must be obedient to their laws, and move within the limits of their decisions. I must go at the times they state, from the platform they determine, stop at the stations on the way that they think fit, and always remember that my ticket does not last for ever—it is only for a time.

Now life is just like that. It is hedged about by laws, and fenced everywhere with conditions. It does not come to any one of us just as we should like. We sometimes think we could alter it, and sometimes we think we will set it at defiance. 'I shall do as I like,' we say, but we are not long before we find that we cannot, and that we have bitterly to suffer for even trying. And one of the unalterable things about life is this: all opportunity is only for a time. Our choice is brief. Our chance often

soon passes away. The door closes before we are aware. There the opportunity is, and with it there is plenty of time in which to do it, but none to lose, none to waste in indolence and thoughtlessness, and really none to waste in vain regrets and painful tears. Our school time is only for a time. It is given to us once, stretching over a number of years, a few more or less as the case may be, and in it we have a chance of getting knowledge and wisdom, and of fitting ourselves for the demands that life will make upon us, and then it ceases and it never comes back. Our opportunities of being obedient to our father and mother, of speaking a word of encouragement and kindness here and there, of giving to this hour a jewel for it to carry to the hand of the recording angel, of filling every day with beautiful thoughts and holy deeds—all these are but for a time, and the day darkens and the door closes, and they are gone. And life itself, our very greatest opportunity, is only for a time. To you

to-day it seems so long, a week in which you are waiting for some expected joy seems as though it would never go, and often days seem to saunter after days as though they had leaden feet. But life is shorter than we think: and in any case it is but for a time. It is a great gift, full of beautiful possibilities, with wide-open doors in every direction, and it offers us all sorts of noble gifts—great sights, great joys, great services; but over it all, and through it all, it has this solemn thing, it is but for a time. The rarest chance flies on quick wings, and the widest open door at last swings to with a clanging sound, and never opens again. That is the second truth my little ticket has kept speaking to me: the rarest privilege is but for a brief hour: the best opportunity comes to an end.

III

But my little ticket has a third thing to say, and this is the most solemn thing of

all. This little ticket has really shaken me when I have thought of it, for it is to me the symbol of a lost opportunity. I had the best intentions. I should use it, I said. Why, of course, that was why I bought it. I thought there was a train at twenty minutes after seven, and when I went to the station, half an hour before the time, found the last train had gone. It was all thoughtlessness. I thought; I should have inquired! I believed; I should have known! And so I had to start and walk on a darkened and lonely road, finding my way as best I could, and all the while hearing with the ear of my heart, the death-knell that this little ticket kept ringing, the death-knell of my opportunity.

> Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
> Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
> Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now!

Now that is the solemn thing, the really awful thing about our opportunities. They are given to us—that is our privilege and our delight. They are but for a time—that

saves life from dullness and touches it with romance. But they may be lost—that is life's tragedy and its desolation—that is the thing that fills it with bitterness and clothes it everywhere with shame. I like to think that it is God who offers us in His own hand the golden opportunities which come to us. But they are never given to us, they are only lent. And one day, whether we have used them or no, they will be gone. Some are of very brief duration: they are there for a single minute, one hour, a day, and then they are gone. Some stretch themselves out over a period of years, but every day they are rolled quietly up at the spent end, and in the last day of the years they are gone, and gone for ever. And our greatest opportunity stretches from our cradle to our grave, but bit by bit it is being taken away, and we are using or neglecting it either for our glory or our shame. We may neglect it through thoughtlessness or carelessness; or we may be wilful and

defiant and set it at naught; or we may be deaf to the voice of wisdom and disregard it. None of these things matters. When the hour comes, when the clock strikes, the opportunity is withdrawn; and, at least, so far as that chance goes, it has slipped away and left us poor and desolate. And there is no bitterness like that bitterness, no sorrow that can be compared to that sorrow; the sorrow of those who know now that they had their chance, but because they were not alert, or were indifferent, or too busy with a thousand other things, or did not mind, have lost it. They call for its return, but it heeds not their voice. They clamour and entreat, but it is deaf to their bitterest cry. It is lost, and lost for ever. And that is the third thing that this little ticket said to me, as I walked in the anxious way that I need never have known if I had been ready—you can lose your opportunities and your chances will steal away for ever.

Boys and girls, it is a little text, but it

has great words to say: and it is your wisdom and mine, and our blessedness to hearken to the words, and always to be obedient to the teaching.

The Boy Whom Everybody Wants

A LITTLE time ago Lord Monkswell went to address a company of boys. That is a very fastidious audience, and I do not doubt that he thought for a long time upon the subject upon which he would speak. A boy's attention is somewhat difficult to catch, it is far harder to hold, and it is not easy to fix a thing in his mind. He hates to be preached at, and begins to get suspicious when there is any suggestion of a moral. But Lord Monkswell thought well, for he announced that in this world there was some one whom everybody wanted. 'Who is that?' every boy would think. He had seen and heard of some whom nobody seemed to want: the people who always seemed to be square people in round holes. And there were many of whom he had heard who were not wanted

by everybody. But who was he that everybody wanted? The speaker was not long in answering his own suggestion. The person whom everybody wants is the person who can always be relied on to do his best.

Isn't that everybody's need? The question might be startling, and set everybody thinking. But the answer would satisfy everybody that did think. That was just what everybody did want. Whether it was at a school, at a cricket match, in an office, when we are off for an outing, among the scouts, anywhere, everywhere, it is just the same. Everybody is on the look-out for him who can be depended on always to do his best. We hate slovenly work, the work with ragged edges, with untied ends—the boy who does not make a clean job of a thing; who only puts half his mind into his business. Men want those who, whether they work or play, always do their best.

Now let us turn this little text of Lord Monkswell's over in our thought and see if

we can get out of it all that he intended. It has a good deal of light to give to us, and it will create a desire to be one of those whom everybody wants, if we think about it in our hearts.

I

THE world wants those who will *do their best*. Many years ago I was with a friend, and we were met by a man who was a friend, but who was a great deal older than either of us. We talked together for a long time, and then our older friend was about to take leave of us. He was a man who thought in pictures, and had a genius for speaking in parables, and so just before he left he looked us both fairly in the face, and he said, 'Look here, you chaps, if God intended you to be half-a-crown and you are only a shilling, He loses eighteenpence by you!' and he was gone. What a startling farewell! What a suggestive adieu! I may be a shilling, a bright, real, good shilling, but that is not enough. Some-

where I stand in a higher value. God's thought and intention for me is two shillings and sixpence, and if I fail of that I am poorer than I ought to be, and He suffers loss. I never could be among the golden sovereigns, but I could be half-a-crown, and I am only a shilling.

It is not enough to be good, that is a great thing and a thing of great joy. But there is something far beyond that. I must be the very best that it is possible for me to be. It is not enough to do things well—there are some people to whom that is the easiest thing in the world. I must do them as well as it is possible for me to do them, and that is often very hard indeed. No matter what the thing that I take in hand—my lessons, a game of cricket, some piece of work which I have to do, my whole life—I must put all my mind and all my heart into it, and never let it leave my hand until I have set it as near to perfection as it is possible for me to set it. That is a great thing to fix in one's mind, a great thing to

reach forward to in everything that one does.

Many years ago there was a great painter. He has painted some of the greatest paintings that the world has ever seen. They have been, and they are, the admiration of the world. Men and women cross seas and continents to stand before them and to behold their beauty. Men said that he had genius: and—poor foolish things!—they thought that this thing came to him in his sleep. They thought that he had only to stand, brush in hand, before the canvas, and the thing almost did itself. But when he died, and they searched his rooms, they found in his portfolios no less than eighty thousand studies which he had made for those pictures which have cast their spell upon the admiration of the world. Before they had only seen him as he stood upon the height, and they thought he had risen to that with strong, swift wing; now they saw that his ascent had been by a ladder, and that that ladder had eighty

thousand rungs, every one of which he had climbed with patient, unwearied steps. Longfellow has set out the truth in a quite familiar verse.

> The heights by great men reached and kept
> Were not attained by sudden flight,
> But they, while their companions slept,
> Were toiling upward in the night.

They never forgot that if a man wanted to do his very best, he must always be patient and diligent, and make the slow ascent that leads to perfection, with hands that do not grow weary and feet that do not tire.

> We have not wings, we cannot soar:
> But we have feet to scale and climb
> By slow degrees, by more and more,
> The cloudy summits of our time.

It is no good, there is no other way, plod, plod, plod is the way of all real ascent.

In Milan there is a great cathedral, which is remarkable for many things, but for none more than for this, that on the outside there are two thousand life-sized figures which are all wrought in solid marble. If you look at the figures that stand by the great

west door, the principal entrance to the Cathedral, the thing that startles you is the exquisite perfectness of the carving. Every least part stands out with distinctness, there is nothing blurred or indefinite or unfinished. But stand near to the figures that are hidden away in secret places on the roof; and there is just the same carefulness, the same delicacy of detail, the same perfection. The sculptors did not say: 'Of course we must be careful about figures that stand where everybody can see them, these we must carve as perfectly as our hands can carve them. But those that human eyes will rarely, if ever see, well! these do not so greatly matter.' They had a finer inspiration that that. All these figures, they said, will be seen by God, and we shall see and know, and we must do our work as perfectly as human hands can do it. And so they lived, and so they loved, and so they toiled, that wherever their work might stand, whether it should be where all men saw it or where it was only seen of

God, it should be as near perfection as their hands could make it.

That then is to be our pattern. That is what everybody wants. Let us lift it up before our eyes to-day and set it where we can always see it. Neither in our living, nor in our play, nor in our work, will we ever do anything that is slovenly or careless. We will not let imperfect things pass out of our hands. All that we touch or do shall be done to the farthest limit of our power. It may be little or it may be big, it shall be as beautiful and good as we can make it. That will often be hard. The old Greeks used to say that perfection dwelt among the craggy heights, and that the way to it was difficult. It has dwelt there ever since, and the way to it has never grown easier. To do our best will often tax us, it will demand patience and endeavour and sacrifice. But to reach it is the thing for which we were born, and to pursue it is to give to every effort a spring and a gladness that come in no other way.

II

But through Lord Monkswell's sentence there shines another golden truth, upon which it will be well for us to fix our minds. The person whom everybody wants is the person *who can be relied upon* to do his best. Be relied upon! There are plenty of people who on occasions do their best; but they cannot be relied upon. You are not certain of them. A brilliant chance offers and they are in the mood, and they will rise to the full height of their opportunity, and they will do their best. But the next opportunity looks little, there are no brilliant lights playing about them, no multitude of interested and interesting spectators, and they are not inspired, and they fall far short of that which it was possible for them to do. You cannot say that they are to be depended upon; you cannot rest in the complete certainty that they will do their very best.

'Can be relied upon!' That is not a far-shining virtue. It is not like a lonely star,

when there is only one in the sky. It does not greatly attract attention. It is a grey virtue, it does not win the admiration of those who like brilliant things. It seems commonplace. Everybody, we think, could have that. But really, what a great thing it is, ay, and how uncommon! We thought we could pick it up anywhere, that everybody could have that. It is just the reverse. And when it is found what lustre it has, how far its glory shines! It is the one virtue that makes many a man; it is the one thing for which he is known and loved. He may not have the brilliant gifts which are given to some, he may not dazzle us with his cleverness, with his ability, with his charm. But he has a rare gift of priceless work, he is a faithful man, one upon whom his brother men can rely, and he will never, like a rotten stick, break in their hands.

Have you ever thought of the value that Jesus attached to this great quality? He often spoke about it. He lifted it up like

a star, and set it glowing in the darkened sky. Listen while I tell you one of His great stories about it. He said there was a man who was going to take a journey into a far country. So he called his servants unto him and gave them gifts. To one he gave five talents, to another three, and to a third one. And he said they were to trade with this money, and one day he should come and then he would reckon with each of them. He would see what each had done with his gifts. The man who had one talent was frightened, he was afraid to venture, he feared he might lose his gift, and so he said the master was hard, he hid it. It had no value to him, he might just as well have been without it. But the other two made the venture; and they worked hard, and used the gifts that had been given. And one day as they listened they heard the sound of the master's returning footsteps. And the first came and said, 'Master, here it is! you gave me five, I have turned it to ten.' And the second said, 'I had three,

but here are six.' Now what did the master say? Did he praise them for the greatness of their gifts? Did he say they had made themselves rich? No! it was not about this that he spoke at all. He did not seem to see the size of their gifts, of that he appeared to take no notice. To both, and to both equally sincerely, he said the same thing, 'Well done! good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful! Thou hast been faithful!' That is his commendation, that his high and holy praise.

The other day I heard a story, which I think is one of the greatest I have ever heard. Some one was talking to a military man about one of the men who was under him. 'Do you know,' he said, 'where So-and-so is now? Have you heard from him lately?' 'No!' he answered, 'I have not heard from him lately, but I know where he is.' 'Where?' he inquired. 'Well, two years ago I sent him to such a point and bade him stay there until he was recalled. He is there, or he is dead!' Just

think of that, 'there! or dead!' There is no other possibility. It is not he may have disobeyed, he may be forgetful, he may have gone to his home. 'He is there or he is dead!' There was a man whom his chief could depend upon. He might die, but death was the only thing that could stand between him and that task which had been committed to his care.

'One who can be relied upon!'—that is the one that every one of us should wish and try to be. And that is within the reach of all of us. It is not ours to decide our gifts, but it is ours to determine their faithful use. We cannot say whether our gifts shall be those glittering gifts that draw all the eyes to their beholding, but we can say that whether they be great or small, whether they be shining or grey, every one of them shall be used to the farthest limit of our power. It is that that brings greatness within the reach of every one of us. It is just there that every one may win a crown. We are little people, and the place

that we have to fill is small, and the duties that are given to us are very little, but we can so love and work and live that we shall win that great quality of fidelity, and all who know us shall know us for this thing, that we can be depended upon, always and everywhere, to do our best.

Boys and girls! It is just here that one of your greatest dangers lies. It is just here that there is need even in your lives for the greatest carefulness. Nearly every boy and girl that I know gets enamoured of a new thing. You love beginnings. And beginnings are interesting and they have a great charm. They lure us away from the old task. That is getting hard, and it has lost its romance. It does not hold us. And this new thing is so entrancing. It has such charms. And we could do this. It looks so easy. And so we are lured and drawn away, and strew the path of our going with unfinished tasks and imperfect work. Our books are half read: our garden is half dug: the rabbit hutch wants a hinge and

a fastening for the door. We are surrounded by things that are only half done. Let us set ourselves to-day, and say that that in our lives shall end. We will not do things by halves but by wholes. Everything shall have a whole mind, a whole heart, and two whole hands. We will do our best, our very best. And we will always do it. We will set ourselves among that select company, the people who can always be relied upon to do their best. We may not have far-shining powers, but such as we have we will use to the farthest limit of our ability.

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